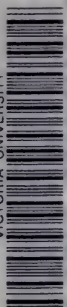


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THE
LEGEND OF THE ROSES
A POEM.

BY
SAMUEL JAMES WATSON.



RAVLAN: A DRAMA.

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Toronto:
HUNTER, ROSE AND COMPANY.
1876.

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THE ARGUMENT.

“Betheleem is a litylle Cytee And toward the Est ende of the Cytee is a fulle fair Chirche and a gracyouse And betwene the Cytee and the Chirche is the Felde Floridus ; that is to seyne, the Feld florished. For als moche as a fayre Mayden was blamed with wrong, and sclaudred for whiche cause sche was demed to the Dethe, and to be brent in that place, to the whiche she was ladd. And as the Fyre began to brenne aboute hire, sche made hire Preyeres to oure Lord, that als wissely as sche was not gylty of that Synne, that He wold helpe hire, and make it to be knowen to alle men of his mercyfulle grace. And whan sche hadde thus seyde, sche entered into the Fuyer: and anon was the Fuer quenched and oute : and the Brondes that weren brennyng, becomen rede Roseres ; and the Brondes that weren not kyndled, becomen white Roseres, fulle of Roses. And theise weren the first Roseres and Roses both white and rede, that evere ony Man saughe. And thus was this Mayden saved be the grace of God. And therefore is that Feld clept the Feld of God florysscht ; for it was fulle of Roses.”

The Voiage and Travaile of Sir John Maundeville, Kt.
Which treateth of the way to Hierusalem ; and
of Marvayles of Inde. A.D. 1327-1360.



THE LEGEND OF THE ROSES.

Part one.

THE TIME.



HE thirsty sands of the Syrian plain
Had quaffed of the blessed Autumn rain,
And earth thanked Heaven with a harvest smile,
Which rippled o'er vineyard and valley of grain
From the Jordan's bank to the marge of Nile.

Like bridegrooms, the streams from the mountain sides
To the orchards flew, as to sweet-breathed brides,
Who awaited their coming in fruit festoons :
Fruit tinged with ripe amber by mellowing moons,
And red with the gold of the midsummer noons.

The air, filled with banquet-hymns of bees,
Swayed with sweet sounds like the Southern seas,
In the blue June midnights ; when the strand,
Like a waiting harp, with song-charged strings
Of shining shells, kisses Ocean's hand,
Who soothes them with slumberous whisperings.

THE PARTING.

It was in the hush of the Autumn night,
The o'erhanging moon was shining,
And, singing beneath the arch of light,
Were two Hebrew maidens : reclining
On a brooklet's bank, where the lilies bent,
As the low-voiced breezes above them went
To respond to the stream's repining.

In their hearts was Joy, like a bridegroom crowned,
His golden empire keeping ;
And their sun-lit future's furthest bound
On Pleasure's bosom lay sleeping ;
And the shadow of sorrow stood off as far
As a cypress leaf from the brightest star
Whose light to the earth was leaping.

From the West a cloud, on wings of dross,
Came swooping in spectral flight across
The blue, to the place where the Night-Queen shone,
And it blotted her out on her rolling throne.

The maidens had seen, with a sad amaze,
The lilies' lustre of pearl grow dim ;
As the sheen of the heavens passed into haze,
Like a winter's mist on the Jordan's brim.
The maidens had seen, with a glance of dread,
The cloud o'ertake the moon as she fled ;
And, when she was swathed in her shadowy shroud,
They watched her eclipse with mute dismay ;
For a shaft from the quiver of the cloud
To their hearts, from the bow of the gloom, clove way.

List ! there are footsteps stealing near !

The maidens start : but, quick as glance,
Like phantom-fiends, in nightmare trance,
Men rush on them, with sword and spear.

The clinging friends are wrenched apart :

One is borne off ; the other left :

While the untouched one, mate-bereft,
Frights night with shriek of bleeding heart.

Again there was calm on that autumn night,

No sound through the air was flowing ;
Save when the breeze, in its sweet-winged flight,
Through the sleeping gardens going ;
Was whispering the flowers to wake, and see
How aloft in the heavens, all gloriously,
The lamps of the night were glowing.

THE SANHEDRIM.

In the gloomy pride of the judges' state,
The chiefs of the stern Sanhedrim sate ;
With their pitiless eyes on the floor bent down,
On their brows of granite a frozen frown ;
Their white lips sealed, like the merciless tomb,
To open only when death or doom
Came forth to the prisoner, standing there
As hopeless as one in a lion's lair.

On that judgment seat sat the Pharisee,
With the pliant conscience and supple knee :
Wearing the hypocrite's marble mask,
Unruffled and smooth ; though behind it bask
The serpent passions that daily breed
From the fruitful slime of the evil deed ;
And gnaw at the soul with fang of flame,
Until nothing is left that Heaven may claim.

There too, sat the scoffing Sadducee,
Who mocked at the thought of futurity :
But from such belief he well might fly,
Whose life was naught but a living lie.
He crawled at the base of creation's pile,
He sought its shadow, but shunned its smile.
He shut his eyes, and, 'twixt him and trust,
Rose darkness and blankness, and death and dust.

In the gorgeous robes of his office drest,
The High Priest shone above all the rest :
And one would think 'twas his place to stand
'Twixt the innocent soul and the law's red hand,
And to draw the mantle of mercy round
The fallen and fainting, wherever found,
And to show to those by their guilt dismayed,
A glimpse of that pardon for which he prayed.

Vain thought ! He cared not for Right nor Wrong,
'Twas the strong who made him—he served the strong.
And the power they gave him was consecrate
To crush whatever they chanced to hate,
To smite the innocent on the cheek,
To trample the poor and insult the weak ;
For he knew how slight are the best of shields
'Gainst the sword the pious pretender wields.

They sate like leopards, these judges grim,
Like leopards crouched on the outer rim
Of the red arena, where Rome displayed
The slaughter feasts for her triumphs made.
And thus they waited their time of prey,
And fumed and chafed at the short delay
Which placed the sands of one ebbing hour
'Twixt the captive's fate and the fang of power.

FATE.

The hall with a hushed throng is filled,
And glutton Expectation stands
With his fierce appetite unstilled,
And gloating o'er his empty hands ;
While hoping that he soon may feed
On prey or prize brought in by chance,
Or by Fate's jackal, Circumstance,
He cares not who shall weep or bleed,
But only cares they come with speed.

At length a murmur, hoarse and loud
Like coming storm's, surged o'er the crowd ;
Such omen-sound as one may hear
When the October woods are sere,
And boding eve-gust whirls and whines
Like troubled ghost amongst the pines.

Bowed down with terror and with shame,
Guarded and bound a prisoner came ;
Round her a sackcloth shroud was flung,
Down to her feet the fetters hung ;
Her streaming tresses fell in vain
To hide the twinings of the chain,
Which, like a snake, the moment foiled,
Lay grimly ready, closer coiled,
Waiting the victim's slightest start,
To wind around and crush her heart.

Speechless she stood, but the moist eye
Spoke out that wordless agony
Which speaks when crushing grief has come
To strike the senses dead or dumb,
To shake our reason on her throne,
To leave us life and breath alone.
For, when thought sinks in grief's eclipse,
And speech is frozen on the lips,
The soul, like central fire close pent,
Finds through the eye, its natural vent,
Speaking with force it could not reach
Through palsied tongue and thickened speech.

Like one locked fast in hideous trance,
Whose will is powerless, and whose glance
Takes in, with dumb and conscious dread,
The preparations for the dead,
And would give all the world to speak
The word that could the grave-spell break :
So stood the maiden, and no word
Could 'scape her lips, not even prayer ;
Voiceless she was as fluttering bird
On which the serpent's eyeballs glare.

But there was that about her look
Which none who gazed on her mistook ;
Those signs which, to the inner sense,

Speak trumpet-tongued of innocence.
For, from the pure in soul, there goes
An influence without restraint ;
As issues perfume from the rose,
As shines the halo round a saint.

But 'tis not sympathy that greets
The maid's accuser, for he meets
Fierce scowls, of old aversion born,
Embittered looks of hate and scorn.
For his was presence that appals,
Like to an adder's when it crawls
Straight toward some flower we look upon,
And makes us almost loathe the sun,
Because he lends an equal light
To things that charm and sicken sight.

Harush, the usurer, was known
Amongst his tribe to stand alone,
As one who fierce delight would take
In torturing for the torture's sake—
Who jested at the widow's prayer,
Who swept away the orphan's share,
And sterner grew if asked to spare
The victim taken in his net
Still 'cross the poor man's pathway set.
His was the tiger's maw and hate,

With carnage never satiate ;
But while the dripping claws have power,
Rending the prey it can't devour,
Maiming whate'er it cannot slay,
Nor sparing even useless prey.

Slowly the High Priest raised his hand,
And, at this gesture of command,
Silence, like death, came over all
Who thronged the gloomy judgment hall.

"Harush, come forth!" the High Priest said,
"And make thy charge, yield not to fear ;
Heaven's wrath will fall upon his head
Who dares obstruct its justice here.
Even if it be thy child or wife,
Thou may'st accuse, it matters not ;
For, perish kindred, country, life!
Rather than there should rest one blot
These would wipe out—or single flaw
Deform the precepts of the law."

Then, thus adjured, the usurer starts,
His story had been pondered well ;
His words, which oft had seared men's hearts,
Like drops of molten iron fell.

“ Oh ! it hath cost me many a tear
Ere I resolved to venture here,
And little thought I, at the time
I laid my brother in the clay,
That I should have to charge a crime
Against his daughter, here, to-day.

“ Long have I nursed her 'neath my roof ;
And she from me hath always known
Such love that I have earned reproof
For loving her above mine own.

“ But, though the springs of love lie deep,
A deeper seat must Conscience keep ;
For love may one day change to gall,
And hatred weave for her a pall ;
But Conscience, if we treat her well,
Cheers us when years have rung love's knell.

“ But to my tale ; and if I speak
In phrase obscure, or accents weak,
'Tis from the strong deep love I bear
For her whom I see weeping there ;
For, there is naught like love in pain,
To darken speech or rack the brain.

“ One night of late, I prayed alone
Within my garden, when there came

A sudden cloud of incense, blown
From the girl's casement, and a flame
Followed the incense ; then both died
Amid the dusk of eventide.

“ An awful thought shot o'er my brain—
‘ What if she pay the heathen rite
To him, who, by the wild boar slain,
Died bleeding in the Paphian's sight ?’
For 'twas the season, as I hear,
When heathen women, once a year,
Make moan for him they Thammuz call,
And down before his statue fall.

“ With pain I never felt before,
I sought my niece's chamber door ;
And, peering in, a sight I saw
Which filled my soul with speechless awe—
Burning sweet-smelling sandal wood
Before an idol, Cydna stood ;
Chanting, in voice that shook with woe,
His death-song whom the boar laid low.
Yea, my niece Cydna, kneeling there,
Before both mine and Heaven's face,
Unto the idol offered prayer,
Thus bringing curses on our race,

“ Oh pity 'twas to see me there,
I rent my garments, tore my hair,
And, falling on my face I cried,
In prayer, that earth might ope and hide
In its deep bosom's kindly gloom
One who too long had 'scaped the tomb—
Whose eyes, till then, all undefiled,
Were doomed to see a brother's child
Taint the sweet breath of holy night
With incense of a heathen rite ;
And bring black shame upon my face,
And forfeit in my heart her place,
And lose, what else had been her due,
My love and Heaven's affection too.”

Then Harush ceased and sat him down ;
But stormed on him, from all the crowd,
Such hate, concentrated in one frown,
Nearing and black like thunder-cloud ;
That it seemed but one spark would fire
The waiting train of righteous ire,
Which, in one moment, had it burst,
Had scorched the perjurer accurst.

Then to the prisoner spoke the Priest—
“ Now, that thine uncle's charge is laid,
Speak out, and we will hear, at least,

Whatever in defence is said.
But this I tell thee—much we fear
Thy crime is proved, thy guilt is clear ;
And, that no words thy lips can urge,
May from thy soul this action purge ;
Nor hyssop, nor a victim slain,
Cleanse nor erase the fearful stain,
Which, spreading from thy heathen hand,
Hath brought pollution on our land.”

Vain spoke the Priest. No utterance came
From her who bore this load of shame.
’Tis rare that Innocence can show
Such strong, broad shield to sudden blow
As fore-armed Guilt, which boldly stands,
Ever on watch, with tongue and hands.
So, pale and speechless, Cydna stood,
In that absorbed but sentient mood,
Which seizes every shape of pain,
And magnifies it o’er again ;
Which watches every look and tone,
And makes each syllable its own,
And drinks in what it hates to hear,
And reasons only from its fear.

Thrice she essayed a word to speak,
But terror sealed it to her tongue ;

While the hot tears raced down her cheek
To the vexed bosom whence they sprung.
Her orient beauty, through those tears,
Seemed fading, in a rainy haze ;
Like some sweet mirage which appears
'Midst the late Autumn's morning rays ;
When up the heavens dark rain clouds race
To blot the mirage out—to trace
Channels of tears on Nature's face—
While darkening Jordan rolls along
As stormy as a battle-song.

Hush ! What is this ? The crowd make way,
At the packed door, for one whose speed
Has brought him many a league to-day,
To help the maiden in her need.
And many a prayer in secret prayed,
Rose for Arion, that he might
Bring to the guiltless one, strong aid—
Say to the falling sword " Be stayed ! "—
To Innocence, " Come forth to light ! "

Then he spoke out : " My name," he said,
" Is known throughout the Judean Land,
As one who thoughtfully hath read
The laws by which our people stand.

Yet read them not in single lines,
But in full volume, blest and broad,
Wherein, from page to page there shines
The finger of their writer, God.
And, by these laws, none have the power,
On one man's word, whoe'er he be,
To rob this maiden of the dower
Of all her race—her liberty.

“ I have come here that I may plead
For one charged falsely with a deed
Which none than Harush better knows,
Ne'er to her wildest fancy rose ;
Nor with her soul made inward pact,
Much less took shape in outward act.

“ But well we know his soul is fraught
With lust of gold, that he hath sought,
Times without count, with vile intent,
To break his brother's testament.
And seize the marriage-portion left
To the weak orphan—fouler theft
Was ne'er conceived, since Achan sold
His life and lot for wedge of gold.

“ Now will I show the charge is one
In foul conspiracy begun ;
And that, if death become her share,

Her uncle, being her only heir,
He will the sole advantage reap,
And he alone the treasure keep ;
She, dying, none save him can claim
Her maiden portion, with its shame.

“ Now to my proofs—they are as plain
As ever wiped out falsehood’s stain—
Proofs, which, like darts by Furies flung,
Will pierce her uncle’s perjured tongue ;
And show him, in his rage for gain,
A meaner murderer than Cain.”

“ Cease, slanderer ! ” the High Priest cries,
The light of anger in his eyes.
“ Darest thou bring thy presence here
To blacken him we all revere ?
Who prays in every public street,
And in the mart where merchants meet ;
And who, though holy, treats with awe
Each form and precept of our law ?
Thou shalt not call one witness forth
To breathe one word against his worth ;
Or to assert that he would err
Who is the Priesthood’s treasurer.
No ! sooner come fresh heathen horde,
To waste our land with fire and sword,

Than have such witness borne 'gainst one
Who is the Priesthood's eldest son.
And questions not, but still obeys,
Spite of what rebel Reason says.

“ As to this maid, it doth appear
Her guilt, alas ! is but too clear.
In lust of heart, by ill advice,
She hath done heathen sacrifice.
And though we pity, we must show
No mercy in the overthrow
Of idols, or for those who wail
For Thammuz, or bow down to Baal.
The culprit shall be burned with fire ;
So let idolaters expire ! ”

Scarce ceased the Priest, when a wild shriek
That blenched the bravest listener's cheek,
Rang from the maiden. Then she fell,
And sweet oblivion took the place
Of memory ; and men said 'twere well
If death would breathe upon her face.
And so they sadly bore her thence,
Like a crushed lily, and as mute ;
But doomed to wake to poignant sense
Ere reaching the grim scaffold's foot.

ARION (*to the Sanhedrim*).

Fathers in Israel ! hear me but a word :
Think not 'tis I, but Mercy speaks to you ;
Saying, in words she learnt from God Himself,
“ Stay the uplifted sword till guilt be shown ;
And, even if guilt be shown, spare the keen sword,
And strike but with the scabbard ; doing this,
You will but carry into human act
That attribute of Him, of whom our Psalmist
Saith, in the blessedest phrase in Holy Writ,
‘ His tender mercies are o'er all His works.’ ”

HIGH PRIEST.

Entreat not mercy for idolaters.
Our fathers cut them off ; and so must we.
We are not wiser, better than our fathers.

ARION.

I hate idolatry—'tis mere childishness,
'Tis but the plaything of the man whose mind
Has grown not with the stature of the time,
But still is folded in his swaddling-clothes.
But Cydna never bowed down to an idol,
She is a pure, true daughter of her race ;
The race which, spite of all its foolishness,
Are men in worship, while the world are babes,

A race which serves not Heaven with eyes, but mind ;
Which saith not " Let me see ere I believe !"
But which, upon the eagle-wings of Faith,
Wings tested in the winter-gales of Reason—
Stands on the peak of Promise, confident,
And, at the Master's summons, " Come !" strikes forth
Into death's darkness, feeling that a Hand,
Reaching from o'er the battlements of heaven,
Holds out both light and welcome.

HIGH PRIEST.

Thou speakest truth, indeed, as to our race ;
But she for whom thou pleadest hath brought shame
Both on herself and Israel.

ARION.

'Tis only one man who accuses her,
And it is in my power, an hour from now,
To prove his words are worthless.

BARZACH, THE SADUCEE.—(*One of the Court.*)

The Court has given judgment, and will not,
To save the worthless life for which you plead,
Allow the character of her accuser
To be the butt of calumny. Sweet looks
Too often charm the scowl of guilt away,

And melt the frown of Justice ; but with us,
The Judges of the men of Israel,
Defenders and avengers of the law,
Sweet looks and tears will not—death only will
Make an atonement for idolatry.

ARION.

Suppose the innocent and unfriended girl
Were an idolatress, which she is not,
She should not die. Our father Abraham,
Whom the Lord chose from out a heathen kin,
Left it not to his children as command
That they should slay the heathen.

HIGH PRIEST.

Hear him ! he doth revile our father Abraham.

ARION.

To speak the truth is not to do reviling.
But now I will go further, and say this—
He who called Abraham forth is now, as then,
Maker and Judge of all the race of men.
Yet He who knows and does all things the best,
Allows the Egyptian, with his loathsome gods,
To walk the self-same earth, breathe the same air
As the true Hebrew worshipper. 'Tis for us

To imitate our Maker : 'tis for us,
When He, in infinite mercy, holds His hand
From smiting those who worship not as we,
To sheathe our swords, to reverence human life,
If we would reverence Him who giveth it.
It is the crown and height of blasphemy,
Rank treason 'gainst the majesty of Heaven,
Harsh insult to its sweet sovereignty,
For us to step between Him and His creatures,
And hiss as 'twere into His pitying face,
"If Thou strik'st not, we will."

HIGH PRIEST.

We are, of old, the avengers of the Lord ;
We are the chosen weapons of His wrath ;
We are the favoured race ; it is to us
All promises are made. Roman and Greek
Are heathen outcasts, put apart from us,
Even by the Lord Himself.

ARION.

Doth rain fall on the Judean land alone ?
Is there no rain elsewhere ? no fruit, no flower ?
No green in field, no blue in the wide heavens ?
No goodness and no favour from the Lord ?
Aye, all these blessings are for other lands,

For all men are God's children, though 'tis we
Who are the honoured first-born.

BARZACH.

Stop ! utter not this slander 'gainst our race.

ARION.

The Greek blood of my mother speaks through me ;
And, though a Hebrew through my sire I be,
I will not be all Hebrew and no Greek.

HIGH PRIEST.

Then take the heathen's lot with heathen race,
And be cut off from Israel. Know this,
That all idolaters must stand accursed,
And, that the Greeks are all idolaters.

ARION.

Art thou all-knowing ? dost thou claim to be
A prophet like Elijah ?

HIGH PRIEST.

Nay, verily.

ARION.

Elijah, then, whom God Himself took up,
Bodily, into glory, thought that he

Alone was left, of all in Israel,
To worship Him in old-time purity.
But inspiration is not all-knowledge ;
And the majestic prophet knew it not,
Until the Lord revealed it unto him,
That, besides him, there were seven thousand men,
In seemingly all-heathen Israel,
Who never had bowed down the knee to Baal,
Nor worshipped 'fore his image.

HIGH PRIEST.

Judea is not Greece ; and, if it were,
We need not look for prophets like the Tishbite ;
Nor need we look for miracles like his,
Nor for the revelations made to him.

BARZACH.

Miracles, revelations, angels, spirits,
Things that we cannot see, or prove or touch,
Are the world's cradle-tales, at which the world,
When it attains to age, mocks heartily.

ARION.

'Tis true Judea is not Greece ; 'tis true
There walks not now a prophet named Elijah.
But, it is also true, there is with us
A prophet, unto whom the mighty Tishbite

Is as a mole-hill to Mount Lebanon,
In works and words and wisdom.

HIGH PRIEST.

Thou borderest upon blasphemy.

ARION.

To blacken, not to praise the good, is blasphemy :
And, as to miracles, they are not past ;
For there is not a single thought we think,
A single word, which is unto that thought
As body unto soul, encasing it
In a corporeal substance, giving it shape
In palpable medium of the vibrant air,
But is a miracle. The wondrous eye of man
A miracle is also. Think how it flies,
Ranging, like to a bee, o'er the bright garden
Which the Almighty Husbandman hath made,
Brimful of beauty, in His universe.
Think how the soul, the grand artificer,
Furnished with ways and instruments of power,
Native unto itself, from matter separate,
Takes what the purveyor-eye may chance to bring,
And, with creative alchemy its own,
Changes it, leavens it with the germ of life,
Brings down the fire from heaven to fashion it

Into immortal monuments of thought,
For God to bless, and men to glory in.
This is a miracle. All our faculties,
Acts, aspirations, memories, aught we do,
Are miracles, and seem not so to be,
Because that they are common. The one fact
That a stone speaks not, and that a man doth,
Is more a miracle than if the sun
Changed places with the glow-worm.

BARZACH.

But what of death ?

ARION.

There is no death ; for that which we call death,
For want of knowledge of all modes of work
Wherewith the Almighty works, for want of words
To picture well the little that we know—
What we call death is nothing but divorcement ;
The keen sword from the worn and fretted scabbard,
The oil and wick and flame from the weak lamp,
The breath of God ta'en back again to heaven
After it warmed a portion of the world.
There is no death. A noble thought ne'er dies,
A good deed never dies, nor a good word,
Nor anything which, since the world began,

Ever did good, even in the humblest way,
Unto humanity. There is no death in nature,
Nor in man's body, nor unto man's soul.
There is no death in anything but doubting.

HIGH PRIEST.

The old faith which thou holdest is all-pure ;
But thy new doctrines blur its gloriousness
With the raw stain of strangeness ; yea, it seems
That the false face and freshness of the new
Have almost witched thee, as they did the girl
Whom our wronged Law has just now sent to doom.

ARION.

I hold it is the right of full-grown men,
Who owe, both unto Faith and unto Reason
An equable allegiance—I hold 'tis right
To reverence, for its own dear sake, the old,
As we would do the keepsakes of dead friends ;
But, also, to give welcome to the new,
As to a child's flower offering.

BARZACH.

The old, such as it was, we know : 'tis ours ;
The present is ours too : such as it is ;
The future is a hollow phantasm,

A thing of dreams and fancies, a poor salve
Which unquiet men keep ready for their hearts,
Which their own acts have wounded.

ARION.

Each to his promptings ; the poor mole will burrow,
The darkness is his home, his place of pleasure ;
The eagle's vans will force him to mount up,
Even if he were unwilling ; the eagle's eye
Is sunward, and sun-loving ; if he stoop,
From his blue empire, to alight on earth,
'Tis appetite, and not his nature, draws him.
But all these things apart : I pray again,
For mercy for the helpless ; yea, I implore,
In His name who is the All-Merciful,
For pity for the guiltless and the friendless.
The girl is innocent, and is as pure
As the first flower our mother Eve beheld
When she awoke in Paradise.

HIGH PRIEST.

Mercy to those that are idolaters,
Is cruelty to our Law ; 'tis vain to plead :
The girl is black with sin : only the flames
Can purify her guiltiness.

BARZACH.

And death ends all.

ARION.

In God's name I declare it is not so.
I stood beside a Hebrew's lonely tomb,
Not far from peaceful Bethany. I saw
Two Hebrew sisters, in their robes of woe,
Raining down tears upon the sepulchre's lid,
As they would melt the frozen door of Death
With the hot showers of sorrow. I saw, too,
The Mighty Prophet born in Bethlehem,
Whose right hand holdeth Love, whose left hand
Power,
Whose words and deeds, like unto Noah's dove,
Float o'er the wreck and deluge of the time,
Bringing back hope and blessing.

HIGH PRIEST.

Remember where thou art, and what thou sayest.

ARION.

Truth owes allegiance unto God alone,
And not to Priests or Kings. Again, I say,
I saw the wondrous Prophet at the tomb,
Drawn thither by that strange and God-like feeling
Which ever leads Him to a scene of suffering ;
Which ever leads Him to keep company
With the afflicted, and to grieve with them.

Silent, a space, the Mighty Prophet stood,
Gazing upon the weepers and the grave,
And then, toward heaven, which, looking on His face,
Saw a diviner heaven reflected there ;
For the Man's heart, conquering the God within,
Sent up a mist upon His countenance,
A mist of tearful tenderness ; and so,
Almighty strength, yielding to human grief,
Stooped to Humanity, and thus stooping down,
Stamped man and woman's sorrow, from that hour,
With the unchangeable and holy seal
Of most inviolate majesty.

The Prophet went up close unto the tomb ;
And, unto the dead friend who slept within,
Whom he had loved in life, and now in death,
He spake this marvel—"Lazarus, come forth !"
These words, which, on the ears of those who heard,
Fell soft as summer dew upon a rose,
Thundered with life, and flashed like lightning
O'er the abysm 'twixt the quick and the dead,
And shook all Hades with a might ungiven
Unto ten thousand thunderbolts. A bird,
Pluming herself upon the tomb, ne'er fluttered ;
Not one blade of the brown grass where we stood,
Was moved aside at these soft words. But he
Who, for four suns and watches of the stars,

Lay locked in granite, heard them ; for they drove
Through the deaf stone, and reached the dead man's
ear,

And he walked forth into the light and sight,
A trophy won from death. And then he made
Obeisance to the soul-recalling Prophet,
Who led him by the hand unto his sisters,
And gave him back to their sweet welcomings.

BARZACH.

Thy sight deceived thy senses, or credulity
Combined, with sight, to blind the eye of Reason.

ARION.

Not so. We men of Israel are not credulous ;
The heathen nations make us laughing-stocks,
Because we worship what we do not see.
The Hebrew soul is not an empty cave,
Wherein sit Ignorance and Fancy, too,
Making new Gods to people it.

HIGH PRIEST.

Thy words would seem to show thy soul, at least,
Is such a cave as thou hast just described.

ARION.

This I will say, in answer to ye all :
Our prophets, in times past, raised up the dead

But 'twas with mighty prayers and wrestlings.
This Prophet, coming out of Galilee,
Conquers death with a whisper ; and so He,
In this one aspect of prerogative
And power from Heaven, in all aspects, too,
Is mightiest of the prophets of our race,
Put all their deeds together. Yea, furthermore :
When we see One who daily walks with us,
One on whose soft and merely uttered word,
The parted souls of men and Death, himself,
Are instant servitors : One upon whose gesture
Healing waits with her balm : One whose sweet
sayings

Assuage heart-hunger like a feast of manna—
When we see all these marvellous attributes,
Even the chill lips of Reason cry aloud,
“This is the Son of God !”

HIGH PRIEST.

Blasphemy ! Blasphemy ! away, away,
The walls will fall on us !



Part two.

GREEK AND ROMAN.



WAS night. Before chained Cydna's cell
Two armed men kept silent ward ;
But plain it was each sentinel
The task and place alike abhorred.
Each wished, at heart, some strong assault
Might burst into the loathsome vault,
And bear the prisoner away
Before the coming of the day.
For well they knew the day would bring
Death, through a hideous suffering,
To her whose moans and clanking chains
Now wrung their hearts and chilled their veins.
'Twas dismal scene : the blinking light
Seemed a red blotch upon the night ;
And, as its ghastly glimmer sprawled

At random, through the thick moist air,
It sought the nooks where reptiles crawled,
And showed the bloated scorpion's lair.
And brought into the loathing view
The spots where clammy fungus grew ;
And lit the noisome sweat that shone
Like hell-brewed tears on every stone.
And when some broken ray had strayed
Into the weird domain of shade,
Mis-shapen forms would seem to grow
On dripping wall and slimy floor ;
Like ghouls that scented human woe,
And yawned and grinned for human gore.

Through every sounding corridor
The night gusts waged a fitful war
With fretful Echo, tired and worn
In answering the wailings borne
On wings of agony and fear,
From every dungeon to her ear.
In sooth it was a fearful place,
Woe travailed here with tears of gall ;
And, never seeing Pity's face,
Nor having Mercy within call,
Brought forth a monstrous offspring there,
Death linked and twin-born with Despair.

One of the men who kept the guard,
From which his better nature shrank,
Thallon, was named, and, for reward
Of valour, held centurion's rank.
The soldier was a Greek, by birth,
And, with his race, he held it true
That all of fair there is on earth,
And all that can delight the view
In Nature, and in human kind,
Like to a glass showed forth the Mind
By whom the world was shaped at first,
By whom the human race was nurst ;
In whom all excellence takes rise
And flows exhaustless from the skies.
And thus the warrior felt regret
As much for beauty crushed in pain,
As for the innocence that set
On loveliness its seal in vain.
He saw the Hebrew maiden tried,
And felt it hard his wrath to hide :
When justice he beheld abused,
And mercy unto truth refused ;
And saw the shield, weak, at the best,
Which the law grudges the opprest,
Shivered at one infuriate blow,
And her who trusted it laid low.

Much had he borne of pain and strife,
In the rude rounds of soldier life ;
Often had been the toy of Fate,
And oft sat pining at Death's gate ;
Oft worn the motley Fortune weaves
For those who toil for laurel leaves.
And often he would ponder o'er
Things which, when reasoned, vex the more :
Life, death, the origin of ill,
The might and mystery of Will,
The Future's darkness and its fear,
The secret of man's sojourn here.
And much he wished to learn aright
The lessons shown in dreams at night ;
For he believed they might bestow
A glimpse of future weal or woe.

His comrade, Quintus, had his home
And birth-place, too, in glorious Rome ;
His was a mind quick to receive,
And quick, on seeing, to believe ;
A mind which its own problems wrought
In action, following fast on thought :
Whose hard, and gnarled and stubborn sense
Was proof 'gainst all save evidence.

Tired of the thoughts which silence brings,

From under Memory's teeming wings,
And which, like ghosts, unbidden come,
When the brave human voice is dumb ;
Thallon unto his comrade spoke,
And the heart-loading silence broke.

THALLON.

'Tis pity that we soldiers should be here,
Guarding the innocent prey which villany
Is keeping for Death's banquet.

QUINTUS.

'Tis pity truly ; 'tis the curse of Force,
That 'tis a weapon which the base may use
As easily as the virtuous.

THALLON.

This maiden should not die ; 'tis villanous,
Even were she proven guilty by their law,
That these stern Hebrews should have privilege
To spill the innocent life of maidenhood ;
To spill the blood of any of God's creatures,
To slake their red-hot bigotry.

QUINTUS.

In shallow souls, as in a shallow cup,
The ingredients of devotion will not mix ;
And the least breath of passion touching them,

They overflow, dregs, ignorance and all,
In virulent floods, which, lava-like, burn up
All in their progress. One drop of such stuff turns
Sweet brotherhood to bitterness, love to gall ;
And, worse than Circe's potion, while it makes
Monsters of those who drink it, changes them
To murderers as well.

THALLON.

I would this were the youth-time o' the world,
Then would some god come down and save this
 maid
From the grim death that waits her.
Oh that great Hercules were here an hour !
As fair a prize he might win back from death
As was the Queen Alcestis.

QUINTUS.

You Greeks are credulous ; your fathers thought
That even a god brought them down fire from
 heaven ;
And that Apollo, lord of light and life,
Stooped to a neat-herd's functions.

THALLON.

And I hold with my sires ; with them believe
That the great Titan, he whose brain could fill

Olympus to the full, but whose big heart
Was tender as the heart of maidenhood,
Looked down in pity on the race of men,
And "for the excessive love he bore to mortals,"
Defied the prison-crag, chain, thunder-bolt,
The worrying eagle's beak, the taunts of gods,
Who were of yore his humble underlings ;
And held up 'gainst the embattled bolts of Heaven,
Patience and firm resolve, the staunchest arms
With which men fight adverse divinities.
I hold, Apollo, too, worked on this earth,
Ennobling thus the humblest task of toil,
And teaching, even to the grandest kings,
That there is honour even in the mire
Of humblest offices.

QUINTUS.

The beauty of the legends fail to lift
Reproach from their mere childishness.

THALLON.

'Tis no reproach, in this hard granite age,
When freshness has forsaken human thought ;
When men, like starving ghouls, fight o'er the bones
Of old beliefs they fancy they have slain
But which will not, because they cannot die ;

'Tis no reproach to hear it e'en from friends,
That our beliefs have childhood on their side ;
For sweeter are the smilings of a babe,
Than grin of shrivelled sneerer.

QUINTUS.

Thine are the dreams of poets : trust them not ;
They all were made for men of simple minds,
And ignorance is the plastic clay wherein
Imagination, if she try her hand,
Can make a hundred heavens, and people each
With a new Jupiter. I tell thee this,
The poets are much greater than their gods,
Save Pallas and Apollo.

THALLON.

In spite of all, I still believe in this :
There was a time the gods communed with men,
And in warm bodily presence walked the earth,
And entered into mortal ways and acts.
But this was in the dim, lost Long Ago,
When the divinities regarded men
In light of younger brethren.

QUINTUS.

The mere belief proves nothing. Men are prone
To give their credence unto what is pleasant.

THALLON.

Knowledge must ever come before belief,
Unless we make men equal to the gods,
By making men creators. Is it rational
To think the gods made man and thrust him forth
Ignorant of their act : left him to do
That which were full as hard as what they did :
Create his gods ? They had the clay to mould ;
Man nothing but the void and empty air,
And neither power, teacher nor instrument
To guide his hand and faculties.

QUINTUS.

It is not plain. The dross of centuries
Covers these old beliefs from human sight.
I cannot brush the mounds of dust away,
For that which I am told may sleep below ;
'Tis true the labour might disclose a gem,
But also might a pebble.

THALLON.

Like to a stream the faith of man rolls on :
Now broadens, now grows deeper, then dries up ;
A source it had, and still a source it has ;
Hidden and yet not hidden ; as fresh and full
For thirsty thought, and panting heart of man,

As 'twas in earth's first morning ; 'tis a spring
That will not be choked up, that somewhere lives
In constant crystal affluence.

QUINTUS.

At what hour is this innocent Hebrew maid
To suffer death and torture ?

THALLON.

The hour is this day's noon.

QUINTUS.

There comes o'er him who stands beside a grave,
If he be one that ever thinks at all,
A flood of feeling, wherein self is lost,
And whereon Thought, dashed wildly here and there,
By chill gusts, whirling from the black Unknown,
Yielding herself to the Inevitable,
Sinks, far away, from sight of any shore,
In dizzy acquiescence.
It is a melancholy mystery,
To think that a few grains of dust and mould
Cover the brain that grasped the universe,
Choke up the warm flow of the heart-poured speech,
Quench the sweet fire of souls that warmed a world,
And still the beating of those breasts with which

The heart of many lands kept unison.
Is this the end of man ? Is all we see,
In the bright heavens above, green earth beneath,
A blazoned mockery ? a painted mask,
Behind which grim Oblivion watches us,
Till his time come to strike ?

THALLON.

The hour and our vile task disquiet thee :
The thoughts of men take colour from the scenes
In which they play their part ; and thus it comes,
That the chameleon of Imagination
Takes up the hue of that whereon it feeds,
Choosing the darkest first.

QUINTUS.

I wish the gods, in whom thou hast such trust,
Would step between this maiden and Death's gulf.
Poor innocent soul ! Do the divinities
Look on her without pity ? while we men,
So far beneath them in good attributes,
Would give our lives for her. Oh, that I had,
Within my right hand's reach, her perjured uncle,
Or his plotting friend, they call High Priest,
The mitred and merciless Lie !

THALLON.

I dreamt last night a strange, bewildering dream,
For Fancy banished Reason from my brain,
And filled his throne with phantoms.

QUINTUS.

Dreams are the ghosts of thoughts the daylight
smothers,
And darkness brings them back again to haunt us.

THALLON.

Midnight hath lessons as the noonday hath,
And 'tis in sleep we learn them.

QUINTUS.

If thy dream be of evil augury,
'Tis but a proof such dreams give useless pain,
If they unfold no plan by which we may
Escape the ills they threaten. Thus they seem
Mere frightful-visaged messengers of Fate,
Which, with mischievous prescience of the Future,
Come to unman us, and to strike down Hope,
Which is the soul of Courage.

THALLON.

I dreamt I stood upon a lordly tower ;
Before me stretched a sea of golden grain,

Which rose and rocked in many a sunny wave,
Each billow, like the bounteous breast of Ceres,
At every heave, bestowing birth to others.
Behind me rose the blue, sky-pillowing hills,
Upon whose sides ambitious cities soared
On wings of marble and magnificence.
From out those cities multitudes of men
Approached to where I stood, and there they paused ;
And, opening in the midst, disclosed to view
An altar, smoking, and, beside its foot,
A maiden bound ; and next I saw the Priest,
Standing expectant, in that heartless calm,
Which habit gives to those whom privilege
Sets up on high to cause or witness suffering.
Then shrieked the Priest unto the multitude,
“ Let sacrifice begin ! ”—
But, at that moment, came a gentle voice,
With that authority of mystery born,
And sweeter than a sacred fountain’s hymn,
Responding to the nightingales that sing
The myrtles of fair Tempé into slumber.
And the voice said : “ Let what is bound go free ! ”
I looked around, and then, amazed, I saw
Defined upon the air, a wondrous face,
Beaming with light, and whereon Love sat throned
As in his native heaven ; upon the brow

Reposed the majesty of perfect manhood
Pillowed on infant innocence ; the eye
Shone with a tenderness akin to sadness,
And look of yearning that was infinite,
And seemed unsatisfied ; upon the lips,
Which looked attuned to Mercy's harmonies,
All-gracious words sat winged and fluttering,
And ready to go forth and banish pain.
In mine own land, in boyhood, I have seen
Our Phidian Jupiter, in burnished gold
And dazzling ivory, when the early morn
Flooded his fane with radiance ; but this face
Outshone his, as the noonday rays outshine
The flickering of the glow-worm ; for it seemed
Like light, incarnate in miraculous mould
Of perfect beauty : and the counterpart
Of His, whom we have seen, and who is called
The "Healer of the People."

QUINTUS.

There may, perhaps, be something in the dream ;
Still, minds o'erworked by day will play by night,
For then the madman that's in all of us,
Slips off his chains, works us unnumbered pranks,
And, while his keeper, Reason, is asleep,
Holds revel in his prison of the brain,
And shakes it as he meant to overthrow it.

THALLON.

The dream is a deep mystery to me,
But whether it bode good or ill, I know not.

QUINTUS.

All dreams are mysteries, like life itself ;
For life's a dream, which, when we try to solve,
We act like children standing by a pool,
Who cast in stones, and, by the sound they make,
As they plunge down, think they can ascertain
Whether the bottom be far off or no.

THALLON.

Hast thou seen Him whom I have named just now,
And who, for countless deeds of timely mercy,
Is, throughout all the Judean Land, adored,
And called by fonder name than Cæsar is—
“The Healer of the People?”

QUINTUS.

I have beheld him often, and, each time,
He looked more gracious than he did before ;
The incarnation of the holiest pity,
That Virtue in her noblest ecstasies
Could picture or aspire to ; and besides,

What is to me a baffling mystery,
His miracles, which so astound men's eyes,
Wherein His will o'errides all natural laws,
And sends Experience and Reason both
To do dumb war with Wonder, seem to me
To be performed to show His love to men,
Rather than show His power, which always gives,
Unlike all power the world e'er saw before,
The foremost place to kindness.

THALLON.

Hast ever heard it talked of in dark whispers,
That much about the time when He was born,
The gods ceased to converse with mortal men,
Even in those dark and double utterances
Wherein both Chance and Ignorance conspired
To fool men's minds and fortunes ?

QUINTUS.

I am not old enough to call to mind
The time when all the oracles grew dumb,
And the gods chose to mock their worshippers
With taunting marble muteness.

THALLON.

I've heard it said at home, amongst us Greeks,
That at the time the oracles grew dumb,

A strange thing happened on the sea at night—
Would'st like to hear the tale ?

QUINTUS.

In mystery there is a fascination
Which all men yield to ; and, fair Truth, herself,
Wears not such pleasing visage if she come
Wanting the robe of strangeness.

The First Christmas.

THALLON.

“ ’Twas night, a Grecian pilot calmly steering
By the bright beacons of the stars o’erhead,
Heard a weird voice along the waves careering,
Saying, in thunder tones, ‘ Great Pan is dead.’

“ He glanced around, no vessel was in showing,
Nor could he aught in human shape descry ;
He only saw the billows’ white plumes flowing
In the wake of the cloud-waves of the sky.

“ He saw no Naiad near, with tresses streaming
Like web of gold with amethysts enwove ;
To tell him that, no more, save in priest’s dreaming,
Pan should hold rule o’er meadow, vale and grove

“ And that, no more, Pan’s thousand altars bending
With weight of garlands, and with wealth of years,
Should see, from off their dust-strewn crowns ascending,

Aught than the bitter incense of scant tears :

“ And that the Gods had earthy grown, and olden,
In their long contact both with men and time ;
That unto dross had changed their foreheads golden,
Worshipped and wreathed in trusting days of
prime :

“ And that Old Truth, grown dim, and few souls
leading,
Had downward circled, till at length it came
To the abyss of Doubt, where, death-mists breeding
Over the grave of Hope, bedimmed Faith’s flame.

“ The pilot heard no tale like this, when leaning
Across his helm, to listen, but he read
Some strange, dread import in the mystic meaning
Of the four solemn words, ‘ Great Pan is Dead.’

“ And as they went, like funeral echoes booming,
They stirred the pilot’s soul with prescient fear ;
Was the old passing, was a new age looming,
Was the Ideal past, the Real near ?

“ He left this unto Fate, but told the warning ;
O'er every haunt of Nymph and Fawn it spread :
And, ere on noon-day's breast had swooned the
morning,
All Greece had heard the wail, 'Great Pan is
dead.' ”

Scarce had the soldier ceased, when rung
Throughout the dungeon vaults a cry
That scared the crook'd bat where it clung,
And made the owl whirr faster by.
And, for a moment, stricken pale,
Each soldier grasped his ready sword,
But sheathed it, for 'twas Cydna's wail,
Fell on their ear, word choking word.

CYDNA.

Oh, woe is me for youth, and hope, and love !
Woe, that blind Fate, in smiting, did not smite
In the unconscious time of infancy,
When the sealed senses blunt the edge of doom
In seeing not its coming.

And, it is mercy, more than misery,
To die in age, when Love stands by to see
That the few sentient sands within life's glass

Shall not be shaken rudely ; that life's flame,
Now dwindled from a torch to a mere speck
Upon the edge of darkness, shall not sink
'Midst wrack and roar, and tempest, but shall fade,
At its own will, like a beloved star,
Which, watched by kindly eyes, the whole night
through,
Withdraws itself, at its appointed time,
Into the morning's bosom.

I to burn incense to a heathen god !
The very weight and horror of the lie
Fell on me like a mountain, and choked up,
With its foul bulk, the channels of all thought,
The avenues of reason and of speech.

Oh, arrowy thought of keenest agony !
That I, who am a maid of Judah's tribe,
With ample privilege of place and dower,
And, with these outward gifts, that far outshine,
In eyes of men, the mere dead gleam of gold
Upon the necks and brows of princesses,—
That I am severed from the common hope,
Of being the mother of Messiah.
It is this hope alone that gilds existence
For us, the daughters of a fallen race,

Whose stream of life, even from its earliest source,
Darkened by foreign shadows, blindly flows
As crooked as our fetters.

And what a hideous mockery of youth's dreams !
The faggot in the place of wedding torch,
The charring flame to make my bridal robe,
The smoke for nuptial canopy, the chains
Eating, with red hot lips, into mine arms,
The roar of burning to usurp mine ear,
Instead of the sweet strains that usher in
All future joys on wings of marriage music.

Oh, for that draught for which the wretched thirst,
To drown all thought and sense ere this day's noon !
'The blessed waters of Oblivion.



Part three.

SALVATION.



HE hour was noon : the sun, o'erhead,
Glared down with fierce and blistering glance ;
All breaths of heaven with heat were dead,
The air was hushed in sweltering trance.
Such heat it was as one may feel
Close by a furnace, when the beat
Of its red arteries make to reel
The very ground beneath our feet ;
Whilst the air o'er it sways and sways,
As if 'twere torn in mortal pain
Upon the forked rack of the blaze ;
And, after swooning, racked again.

In spite of heat and dust and glare,
 Around a stake there sadly stood,
Speaking no word, except in prayer,
 A vast awe-stricken multitude.
And well might she beside that stake,
Both prayer and sympathy awake ;
For far and near 'twas known and told,
She had been sacrificed for gold ;
By him who had, for lucre's lust,
Betrayed his brother's orphan-trust.

'Twas sight to stand for life apart,
As sorest that e'er smote the heart ;
To see the victim's aspect wild,
The clasping chains, the faggots piled ;
The speck of smoke that marked out where
Crouched the grim executioner,
The first time conscious of disgrace,
And seeking to conceal his face.

But there were those in whom there dwelt
A wild hope, unexpressed, but felt,
That, ere the moment had expired,
Which should behold the faggot fired,
Some Heaven-sent help, as yet unknown,
Should in an instant's time be shown,

And, coming as the death-torch came
To light the pile, dash out its flame.

But hope is false, and help too late ;
The hour has come—the hour of Fate.
The pile is fired, the smoke ascends,
And a wild shriek the silence rends ;
And every eye with tears is filled,
And every pulse with fear is stilled.

But hark ! there rings a distant cheer,
Louder it grows in rolling near ;
It shakes the air, it wakes the hills,
Through every heart it leaps and thrills ;
And, like a joyous herald, brings
The sound of help upon its wings.

As the eye takes in, with a gladdened sweep,
The lordliest peak where the sunbeams sleep,
The loveliest star in night's blazing dome,
The beacon's first flash o'er the storm-dark foam,
The brightest flower in the gemmed array
Called up by the kiss and the wand of May :

So each eye took in, at one rapid glance,
A glorious form which it saw advance ;
With a look of pity, a brow benign,
A face on which there was seen to shine

In matchless majesty, Love Divine.
And thus, amidst joy-burst and heart acclaim,
The Healer and Friend of the People came.

He paused at the stake—of their own accord
The flames fell down at the sight of the Lord ;
And that Voice, whose power had raised up the dead,
In tones of ineffable sweetness said,
“Daughter, thine innocence pleads to Me,
Come hence and live, for I make thee free !”

Then burst asunder every chain,
Then ceased in Cydna every pain ;
And, in new beauty, forth she came
Unharm'd by fire, unscorched by flame.

For but a pulse-beat's flying space
Amazement sat on every face ;
All hearts stood still, all speech was hushed,
And reason under wonder crushed.
But soon as thought regained her throne,
And o'er the other senses shone,
And flashed on all, in full extent,
The miracle, and what it meant ;
A great shout burst the silence-seal,
And rose to heaven, peal chasing peal ;
Up and around, the cheering rolled,

It shook the temple's dome of gold ;
Next o'er the Kedron's brook it sped,
Waking the Valley of the Dead :
Then gathering volume, as it met
The echoes of Mount Olivet,
Descended, booming, to the vales,
Loud as a hundred winter gales :
It roused the shepherd where he lay
To drowse the noon-tide's heat away ;
In husbandman, by field and hill,
It woke a keen delightful thrill,
(For those enslaved still hail the strange,
And welcome aught that augurs change :)
It scared the eagle as he swept
The dizziest cloud where sunlight slept ;
And made him turn his gaze away
From sleeping babe he marked for prey ;
Eastward it spread to Jordan's brink,
Frighting the lion crouched to drink ;
Westward it pealed o'er deserts free,
Winging toward the Middle Sea.
And now the mountain echoes ring
With the loud shout, " We'll make him King !"
And, as one man, the multitude
Darted their glances where He stood,
Prepared, at once, to bear Him thence,

And crown Him with all reverence.

It was in vain—they only saw

 The maiden whom He saved, in prayer ;

And felt, with feelings of deep awe,

 That He had vanished—none knew where.

Then lo ! as if the more to swell

The wonder of the miracle,

And splendour out of death to bring,

And cause from ashes life to spring :

The burning embers, hissing warm,

 Obeying His almighty power,

Change, in a moment, to a form

 Of beauty only seen that hour ;

And, as the shape of flowers they take,

'Tis as Red Roses they awake :

And next, the unkindled brands arise,

 And a fresh miracle disclose,

Opening, the first time to the skies,

 The bosoms of the fair White Rose.

THE END.

RAVLAN.

A DRAMA.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

RAVLAN, Prince of Britain and Chief Druid.

ATHELSTANE, King of Britain.

BRITOMART, Chief Druidess.

AIDNAI, daughter of the Druidess.

VARTH, son of the Druidess.

MAVIAN, wife of Varth.

THORWOLF, Commander of the Forces.

SAXO, a Danish prisoner.

KLOOF, a Court jester.

SONGFOND, a Bard.

ETHA, sister of Songfond.

Witches, Judges, Soldiers, etc.



RAVLAN.

A DRAMA,



ACT I.

SCENE I.—*Palace by the Sea Shore.*

[*Enter Courier.*]

COURIER (knocking).



HERE be the sentinels ? 'tis not yet morn,
And so thinks vigilance, for 'tis asleep.
The King hath wakeful servants on the
watch ;

Here stand I, like unwelcomed beggarman,
Craving admission to a banquet's crumbs,
After the revel is a whole day old.

This air nips chill, like great men's courtesies,
Or charities bestowed in open day.

PORTER—*from his Watch Tower.*

Who, at this robbers' season, dares to come
Within a league of slumbering royalty ?

COURIER.

Open the wicket quickly, good old friend ;
The King our master's business urgeth haste ;
Events, of late, march with a giant's stride,
And must not find us napping.

PORTER.

Thou drunken boor, this place is not thy hovel ;
Imagination fools such clowns as thou
When wine lends wings to sober ignorance.

COURIER.

Ingratitude hath no such votaries
As those she picks from old and pampered servants ;
Drones, feeding on the honey of good nature,
To pay it back with poison.—I still find
A great man's servant greater than himself,
And here is further proof of it.

Enter Captain of the Guard.

CAPTAIN.

Hast thou not roused our sleepy porter yet,
Or will he not yield entrance ?

COURIER.

He says the King's asleep : let him sleep on ;
'Tis sign his conscience is at ease—a thing
Common with peasants, seldom with a King ;
I hope he'll sleep as sound to-morrow morn,
But fear the hope is fruitless.

CAPTAIN.

Hast news of evil which concerns the King ?
Thy words would seem so, and I often find
An early messenger brings no good tidings.

COURIER.

I fain would tell thee, but the King alone
Must first receive my message.

CAPTAIN.

Why stand you thus, with eyes strained far to sea-
ward,
Gazing with vacant stare on cloud and sea,
F

Baffling your vision with the mazy wreaths
The wayward wind hangs in the dawn-flushed sky
As dangerous puzzles for our mariners ?

COURIER.

Familiar unto me are sky and sea ;
But 'twas not to discover aught in nature
Of novelty to me, you found me now,
Trying to peer beyond that mystic line
Where the high heaven, in friendly intercourse,
Salutes the embracing ocean.

CAPTAIN.

What seekest thou in yonder bank of clouds ?

COURIER.

That which I cannot see, nor thou canst know.

CAPTAIN.

It may be thou hast heard of pirate ships,
And watch their coming ?

COURIER.

Danger that warns is never dangerous ;
But danger, when it comes unheralded,
Is but another name for destiny. [*Exeunt.*]

SCENE II.—*The King in Council.*

KING ATHELSTANE.

A year hath fled since we met here before,
And it was one of many fair delights,
For Plenty, floating on the wings of Peace,
Did visit all the land with fruitfulness.
Peace sleeps, soft-pillowed, on our folded flags ;
We have not heard the faintest sound of strife,
The bluster of the anger-breathing trump,
The roar of chariots striving for the front ;
Nor on our ears has pealed the thunder crash
Born of the shock of the two battle clouds
That burst in havoc in the vanguard's clash.
Our war-steeds drag the treasure-searching plough,
Our chariot wheels are rotting on their axles,
And in our helms the dove may build her nest,
The mouse may gnaw a surfeit off our quivers.
Now, on this eve of yearly festival,
Held in the honour of our god, the sun,
We should prepare to pay to him to-morrow,
Tribute of that which the gods hold most dear,
The bosom's worthiest wealth—deep gratitude.
(Alarm without.)

[*Enter a number of soldiers with a prisoner.*]

KING.

What means this tumult that we hear outside,
And which, like summer tempest, sudden breaks
Upon the calm and consequence of counsel ?

CAPTAIN.

My liege, we have a Danish prisoner.

KING.

Ha ! Who art thou ? A Northman by thy dress,
And one who fancies, judging by his bearing,
That we are captives, and himself the captor.

PRISONER.

My name is Saxo : I am Danish born,
And am a soldier, and no foe nor spy.

THORWOLF.

If pride of speech could burst thy fetters now,
Thou might'st bid chains defiance.

PRISONER.

I have been captured, but was overpowered ;
One sword can rarely overcome a score,
Though one heart may be braver than a hundred.

KING.

Where was the prisoner captured ?

CAPTAIN.

I was informed, my liege, in whisperings,
That pirate ships were seen upon our coast ;
So, thereupon, my vigilance was spurred,
And early in the morn I found this man
Aboard the smallest of those ocean harpies,
And forthwith brought him hither.

KING.

My lords, 'tis now the time to let you know,
That I have been informed, on sure report,
The Danish General, who hath conquered France,
Intends, within the briefest time he may,
To hurl his squadrons on the Isle of Britain.

THORWOLF.

Then we had better look unto our musters,
Take a farewell of feasts and solemn rites,
And quick prepare to offer up to Danger,
The sacrifices that appease him best.
And those are fleets and armies.

[*Enter Ravlan.*]

RAVLAN.

So! you have ta'en a Danish soldier captive!
And captive's fate is hardest next to death.
For, in his den, his memory broods upon
The glad green fields beyond his dungeon walls—
Upon some playful, dimpling, rivulet,
Beguiling its bright, sea-ward pilgrimage,
By prattling of green hollows in the woods,
Where oft he played, and slept, and dreamt sweet
dreams.

Why should we keep this Northman in our chains?
For he hath done no crime against our land.

KING.

Good nephew, we must let the Council speak:
My lords, what think ye of the whole affair,
And whether we should hold or liberate
The man whom we have captured?

THORWOLF.

The Council's mind agrees with mine, my liege,—
He is a spy, and so should suffer death,
And that upon the morrow.

RAVLAN.

Uncle and King, and you his Council here,

I tell you in the face of Heaven and earth,
That this is nought but murder.

KING.

Northman ! our Council have resolved thy fate,
And say thou art a spy sent here from Denmark,
To find what weakness there may be in Britain ;
And so, to death they order thee to-morrow.

RAVLAN.

Let him have trial fair, we can afford it ;
Weakness is always vengeful, prompt and cruel ;
But Strength, like to a lion in a dream,
Will not, unless aroused through wantonness,
Strike for the sake of striking. Let us pause :
The State is strong to brook delay
When it is one man's life against a million.
Besides, what he has said may turn out true,
And to find out the truth is time well spent,
Should it be ten years hence. 'Tis often found
That a lie and hot haste are fervent friends.

PRISONER.

A soldier knows the worst that death can do ;
Has looked upon him in a hundred shapes,
Nor fears him in them all.

[Enter Britomart, the Chief Druidess.]

DRUIDESS.

To-morrow is our day of festival,
And so this spy was trapped in nick of time,
To add revenge unto our gratitude.

RAVLAN.

No, by the Gods, such crime must never be,
While I am the Chief Druid of this isle.

KING.

I'm half with thee in what thou dost oppose ;
But then what saith our Council ?

DRUIDESS.

Before you speak, I make this solemn vow :
He who says nay against the Northman's death,
On that man's wife I'll stamp a dreadful curse,
And make of her a hideous, walking plague,
So loathsome, from her head unto her feet,
That Death will fly her and refuse to take her.

KING.

A fearful threat indeed.

RAVLAN.

Let not such night-hag threatenings weigh with you ;
An action, just, pious and charitable,
Enrages the infernal gods we know ;
But, while it angers, paralyses them,
And baulks them in mid-mischief.

KING.

What saith the Council ?

THORWOLF.

Let him be burned—we vote no other death.

SAXO.

For thee, good Priest, I've nothing but my thanks,
For those who sit with thee a brave man's scorn.
My sires have looked upon the back of kings,
But neither king nor death shall look on mine.
But now, when you have said and done your worst—
Save this good Priest, who hath a soldier's soul—
I choose my time to tell you who I am.
Know, then, I am no spy, but am a Viking,
The captain of a war-drake, now in France,
And that, in the wild gale two days ago,
While trying in my shalop to save life,
Was brushed away to England. *(Exeunt.)*

SCENE III.—*A Grove.*

[*Enter Druidess and Thorwolf.*]

THORWOLF.

How many years have flown since you and I
Met here before, to talk of things of state ?

DRUIDESS.

If you can't read them on your wrinkled brow,
I know, at least, they're stamped upon my heart.

THORWOLF.

I am a soldier, live from day to day,
Am the king's plaything in his pettiest game,
And so my life is his, and not mine own ;
Therefore I take no count of years not mine.

DRUIDESS.

Thy words are true, though memory be dull ;
'Thou hast been but a slave for many years,
A shuttlecock for a weak monarch's pastime,
When love of change urged him to play at war,
To show the world a king should have ambition.

THORWOLF.

'Tis true, too true, I've been a shuttlecock,
And, in my prime of years, am cast aside,
Condemned to mope about a court all day,
And not allowed, as is a well-worn flag,
To rest and rust in honour.

DRUIDESS.

Neglect and merit still go hand in hand,
And no case proves it stronger than thine own.

THORWOLF.

Thou still hast been my friend.

DRUIDESS.

If the King knew thy worth one-half as well,
Thou wouldst have cause to say the same of him.

THORWOLF.

He shuts his eyes against what I have done,
With most ungrateful blindness.

DRUIDESS.

Small minds, when in high places, thirst for fame,
And rob their servitors of all they win,
Then thrust them out of doors for very fear

The world would hiss the petty pilferers
In presence of the pilfered. Alas ! alas !
A cursed thing is jealousy.

THORWOLF.

If all my wounds had tongues, they would proclaim
A cursed thing is jealousy.

DRUIDESS.

Are your past wrongs so dim you cannot tell
How long ago it is since we two met
Within this grove, and held a high debate
Anent the filling of the throne of Britain ?

THORWOLF.

So fresh and many are mine injuries,
That they o'ercloud my memory, and still
Their sting is deep—yea, it is everlasting.

DRUIDESS.

Spoken like soldier ; so I've hope of thee,
And will refresh thy lagging memory.
'Tis ten drear years ago since we met here.
King Ravlan then was tenant of the throne
Which now his brother holds unworthily.

This Ravlan was unjust to you and me,
Refused you honours that you fairly won,
Denied me—well, I'll not repeat it now—
I had my grievance, but, compared to yours,
'Twas but an ant-hill to a pyramid.

THORWOLF.

Perhaps it was—go on.

DRUIDESS.

'Twixt you and me we tore up by the fangs
That overshadowing oak of sovereignty,
Whose wide-spread roots were sucking up our power,
And stretched themselves, like bars of strongest
steel,
Across each path by which we wished to gain
The hill of our ambition.

THORWOLF.

Speak lower, for there might be eaves-droppers ;
A deed like ours, if it were breathed aloud,
Would poison even the pure air of heaven,
So that the clouds would drop upon the earth
Mildew and gall.

DRUIDESS.

Fear makes thee eloquent, but not repentant.
Leave such thoughts to the Future—'tis her care.

THORWOLF.

'Twas but a moment's weakness, and is gone.

DRUIDESS.

In Ravlan's stead we set his brother up,
The present monarch, Athelstane, and thought
He'd prove but royal plaster in our hands,
And that we might, as pleased us, mould and move
him.

But he has proved a strong and two-edged dagger,
Which cuts us to the core if e'er we touch it.

THORWOLF.

He has no issue, for he never wed,
And both of us are foiled in the fond hope
That he would have chosen, some long time ere this,
Which of us should succeed him at his death ;
And Ravlan, his nephew, oft hath pledged
His fixed resolve never to wear the crown
Which could not shield his sire from murderers.

DRUIDESS.

Dost thou remember what our bargain was ?

THORWOLF.

My memory is as treacherous as a quicksand ;

But still, I think I may affirm this much :
That each of us agreed, if one were chosen
To take the vacant seat of Athelstane,
To wed the other, and reign king and queen.
That dream is over, and we must confess
Our crime has brought us nothing but remorse.

DRUIDESS.

Speak not of crime ! oh, has it come to this,
That I, a woman, must remind of manhood
One who wears sword, and styles himself a soldier ?

THORWOLF.

Pshaw ! Fear is just as foreign to my soul
As mercy to a woman or a conqueror.

DRUIDESS.

Then why call up the Past, and name it crime ?
Much thinking doth make madmen such as thou ;
Men with thick skulls alone are fit for deeds
Ambition calls upon us to perform,
Ere she exchange for them what we desire,
Her magic crown and purple of success.

THORWOLF.

Satan might rival thee in artifice,

But could not overcome thee in persuasion.
Whom dost thou blame for having taught the king
To use us as he doth ?

DRUIDESS.

The question bears its answer on its face,—
'Tis Ravlan, the chief Druid, only son
Of him whose reign we shortened years ago.
His uncle now is easy, old and weak,
And hearkens to the voice of that young cur
As if he were an oracle, while you,
Who shed your blood before the brat was born,
Are, like an old, wound-worn and gallant hound,
Forced to yield precedence to untried whelps,
And then flung on the dunghill.

THORWOLF.

I will not bear it, as I am a man—
The thought is horrible, and drives me mad.

DRUIDESS.

Let not the whirlwind of a righteous rage
Tear from thy soul the curtain of cool caution,
That every man may take a peep within,
And have thee at his mercy.

THORWOLF.

Now say to me what thou wouldst have me do ;
I cannot think in fire and speak in ice,
I cannot dam my passion's torrents up,
When words like thine sweep o'er them like a gale
And lash them into fury.

DRUIDESS.

Wouldst thou now play another game with Fortune,
One of the stakes a crown ?

THORWOLF.

What is the other ?

DRUIDESS.

It often has been risked before this time—
I mean thy life.

THORWOLF.

Of mine own blood I always have been reckless,
And well I might be so with other men's.
But after we have put the king aside,
What shall we do with Ravlan ?

DRUIDESS.

Leave him to me, I'll sweep him from our path ;

But first will sting him to the very soul,
And turn to adder's gall the smallest spring
That pours into his heart a drop of pleasure.

THORWOLF.

Should I succeed, then who will share my throne ?
Will you be Queen ? or have you not a daughter ?

DRUIDESS.

Ha ! Do you think I'm grown too old for you ?
Though forty years have not passed o'er my head.
Well, I release you from our old agreement,
That we should wed if either of us won
The crown of Britain. Yes, I have a daughter,
And you may marry her if so you wish,
But first must gain the throne.

THORWOLF.

Is she not loved by Ravlan ?

DRUIDESS.

On her fair cheek ne'er shall his poisonous lips
Imprint the kiss of husband.

THORWOLF.

Enough : now shall I to my task, nor stay

Till all the plans that brood within my brain
For the accomplishing of our great aim,
Take shape and action—till this royal drone
Yield up to me his life as well as throne.

[*Exit Thorwolf.*]

DRUIDESS.

So thou art gone, blind, envious, scheming fool,
Without the brains to circumvent a churl,
But with ambition to be made a king,
And have me for thy subject, not thy queen.
I see he does not wish to wed with me,
Which once was in our compact—be it so.
Fickle, unfertile fool, he will repent
The slur that he has cast on charms that once
Transformed to worshippers whoever saw them.
How old am I? how old? Ah! cruel query,
'Tis vain to answer thee, but not so old
That beauty and myself have said farewell.
That this ungrateful boor should ask of me
If that I had a daughter—aye, I have,
But he shall never wed her, king or no.
Yet I will feed his foul ambition full
With such hot viands as love, power and fame,
Humour his whims as if he were a babe,

Pour oil upon the flames of discontent,
Be the purveyor of his least caprice,
Keep still before his eye the tempting crown,
And still more tempting beauty of my daughter ;
I'll do all this, till I achieve my purpose,
And then—what then ? I'll crush him in his slime,
Just as a chariot-wheel would crush a snail
That dared to stop it as it thundered on.
Can nothing compensate for fading charms,
Not even knowledge, intellect nor power ?
Ah ! no ; and were the world itself a woman's
She'd barter it, when in her autumn days,
For one brief year of youth.
Treason has ever been reward of woman ;
Patience, however, is her only weapon,
Patience is power, when she has wit to use it,
As I will do, e'en twenty years from now ;
And, on the grave of my departed youth,
I'll sacrifice, unto the ghosts of beauty,
The cruel boor who hath insulted me ;
And, on the altar of an old revenge,
Will offer up this drooping, dotard king,
And in his place will set mine only son,
Who is the very image of myself,
And who would jump to murder if I bade him,
And still is fascinated by revenge.

He will avenge me on this treacherous Thorwolf,
And rid me likewise of the king and Ravlan.
Then all mine enemies too late shall know
Women and cunning strike the deadliest blow.

[*Exit Druidess.*]

SCENE III.—*A room in the Palace.*

[*Enter Ravlan, reading a letter.*]

RAVLAN—(*reads.*)

“Danger threatens. It may come from the North,
South, East or West; from the earth or the ocean. Be-
ware.”

This letter speaks of danger, but says not
Whence it may come, and whom it menaces.
I'll speak unto my uncle of this matter;
For oftentimes I have observed of late,
That, as he passes 'mongst the populace,
He meets not that reception which of old
Was wont to greet him in the various shapes
Of acclamation, love and reverence.
A silent people is a dangerous sign

Both for the nation and whoever rules it.
The soldiers, too, seem to grow petulant,
And, as he lately passed along their ranks,
Paid him a homage cold, mechanical,
As if it were their duty, not their hearts,
That told them he was present. It is strange
That these things pass and he not notice them.
But, the unconsciousness of any evil
Done to his people or his soldiery
Closes his eyes to signs that guilt would note,
And act on in an instant.
Yonder he comes,—how pale he looks and worn !
The worm of state is gnawing at his heart ;
The crown has burned the hair from that brave brow,
From those bright eyes stolen the imperial flash,
Which once outshone its jewels, and, in fight,
Like battle-torches gleamed, to light the way
For the victorious squadrons behind.
I pity him : the old, imposing stride
Is changed into a languid, moping march ;
As slow as sleep, approaching feverish men.
Oh, age ! thou'rt tedious, but we pardon thee !
For, with a tombstone tied upon thy back,
No one can blame thy slowness.

[*Enter King.*]

KING.

How doth my noble nephew ?

RAVLAN.

Better than my deserts, most worthy sir,
How doth your Majesty ?

KING.

Age steals upon me fast—death's skirmishers,
Such as keen chills, thick coughs and sleepless nights,
Assault me with most fierce persistency.
Thou soon shalt have my place and parting blessing.

RAVLAN.

May Heaven postpone that sackcloth day, my lord,
And take from me the years I yet may live,
And add them unto thine.

KING.

'Tis a good prayer, kind nephew, but, to me,
'Twere more than mercy not to have it answered.
I have some news for thee—strange news, if true.

RAVLAN.

I hope its goodness makes it strange, my lord,
For I've had little news that's good of late.

KING.

'Tis evil ; for a courier, in hot haste,
Hath brought me word that on the shores of France
The Danish hosts are marshalling for Britain.
This is the second time I've heard the same,
And now I'm come to ask of thee advice
In this most fateful juncture.

RAVLAN.

Send messengers at once throughout the land,
Men you can trust, of that wild eloquence
Which sets the soul on fire, the blood aflame ;
Who leap at once into the hearers' hearts,
As quick as leopards spring upon their prey.
And let these messengers rouse all to arms,
And show in heroic and glowing words—
Each word a picture, full of throbbing life,
Fitted for framing in the listener's soul—
The needs of State, the horrors that would stalk,
Like myriads of foul and wasting fiends,
Right in the wake of any conqueror.

KING.

Right well advised, I'll carry out thy plan
With all the diligence our needs demand ;

But, nephew, I am weary of this crown,
And yield it to you now. Will you accept it ?

RAVLAN.

I will not take it, uncle. I'm too young,
And lack, 'mongst other things, experience,
Which, in a sense, is a prophetic guide,
To cope with most emergencies. Besides,
My office of Chief Druid taxes me
Beyond my powers already.

KING.

I cannot force you, but the time draws near
When you must either rule or be a subject.
Dost recollect thy father, Ravlan ?

RAVLAN.

Like a dim dream, when first I learned to dream,
He seems to my remembrance ; when I try
To pick him from the cloudy shapes of childhood,
Like a face in the fire he melts away,
And, amongst others, changes to another,
And so his features vanish. Would I might,
After all these long years of earnest search,
Find out that even his few sacred bones

Slept in the soil of Britain ! Still I think
That I will come on his poor relics yet.
But until this, my life task, shall be done,
Nothing will tempt me to touch things of State ;
And wert thou, uncle, dead to me to-morrow,
Which Heaven in love forefend, the crown thou
hast
I would not touch, while that my father's fate
Is still my life's enigma.

KING.

Thy mother died when thou first saw'st the light ;
Thy father, after whom thou tak'st thy name,
Was King of Britain, and mine only brother.
He made a royal visit to the north,
And one night, after he had graced a banquet,
Was seen no more by eyes of mortal men.
As his sole brother I assumed the crown,
But 'twas to keep it safe for thee, the heir,
And hand it to thee, as it came to me,
With no stain on its native purity.
But now I leave thee, and will forthwith see
That what you counselled as to threatened danger
Be quickly put in practice.

[*Exeunt.*]

SCENE IV.—*A Chamber in the Palace.*[*Enter Ravlan and Aidnai.*]

RAVLAN.

Welcome, fair Aidnai, 'tis a golden day
That brings thy presence with it. Since the hour
When last we met beside the sounding shore,
The breath of Time has breathed on thee in bloom,
So kindly has he cherished all thy charms;
As if he wished no other but himself
Should be the first to feast on them to fulness.

AIDNAI.

You might forget me easily, my lord,
But not your arts of flattery.

RAVLAN.

Sweet, smiling sceptic, wilt thou ne'er believe
That praise is but another name for truth,
When thy fair self art object of that praise,
And that is always? But, inform me, Aidnai,
Hast thou been pondering on the words I said
When last we were together?

AIDNAL.

Thy words were many, and they meant so much
I could not recollect, nor could I fathom them.

RAVLAN.

I can repeat them to thee once again.
If thou consent to hear them.

AIDNAL.

Try not the task, it were to ask too much ;
For it may be that, but one day ago,
Some other maiden heard them from your lips,
And thinks them over, as is maiden's wont,
Until she give their meaning up, and then,
In sheer despair, resolves to love the speaker.
Some other time will suit such fleeting fancies,
But now I've come to talk of other things.
I've heard that some do plot to bar the way
Between you and the crown that will be yours
When Death shall call away King Athelstane ;
Therefore I came to seek you out to-day,
To put you on your watchfulness.

RAVLAN.

Kind, thoughtful soul, I thank thee from my heart,

Not that I place much value on the crown,
But for the golden fact that, in mine absence,
I had a moment's harbour in thy thoughts,
And that those thoughts were kindly.

AIDNAI.

What I have done is in itself so slight,
It scarcely merits e'en a pebble's place
In the wide wall of friendship.

RAVLAN.

Nay, yours is that true friendship rarely found,
Which toils unknown, and without recompense.
Friendship like yours works not in open day,
Nor stands aloof upon the mountain top
To draw the eyes of all the world upon it.
True friendship hath a thousand eyes, no tongue ;
'Tis like the watchful stars, and just as silent ;
It is a guardian angel and sleeps not :
'Tis Mercy's messenger, a peerless spirit,
And stands above its blessed kin in this,
That it foregoes its home, which is in heaven,
To live 'mongst men for whom it always yearns,
That it may make them better.

RAVLAN.

AIDNAL.

My lord, my task is done—I must depart.
Be watchful of thyself and I'm repaid.

RAVLAN.

A thousand thanks, and would that every day
Thou hadst new warnings for me, so I might
Behold thee oftener. Come, I'll be thine escort
Beyond the palace boundaries.

[*Exeunt.*]

SCENE V.—*The Danish Prisoner sleeping in a Cell. In
the distance a wicker-work cage, the shape of a man.*

[*Enter Druidess and her son Varth.*]

VARTH.

Good mother, what intent may bring thee here?
Yon Danish prisoner, now so fast asleep,
Can have no interest for you or me.

DRUIDESS.

What I do now may be a mystery,
But 'tis in thy behoof I act in it.

Thou know'st how deeply I hate Ravlan's race,
Once more I'll tell thee wherefore. Ere thy birth,
Old Evilrath was monarch of the island,
And, at his death, old Ravlan and thy sire
Contended for the crown. Fate baffled us,
For Ravlan had the trick of winning men,
A cursed gift, the which his son inherits ;
And so, thy sire, rejected by the people,
Died, by his own wild hand, the self-same day.
Thy father's rival long hath passed away,
And soon his son shall follow. It is true
My cup of vengeance has been long in filling,
But so much sweeter will the draught become
Unto my parched-up passion, when the cup
Receives the last ingredient of my hate,
Which soon shall be, if Fortune smile on me,
And Heaven thwart not my purposes.

VARTH.

What about Ravlan's sister ? She's my wife,
And surely your revenge sweeps not so wide
As to enclose a woman in its circle ?

DRUIDESS.

I am a woman, and a woman's fate
Is best in woman's hands—that is in mine.

You easily can find another wife ;
Rank traps most women, as its wearers know,
And you will be a king. 'Gainst gold and place
Few women have been proof, and he who has them,
Were he as hideous as pock-pitted panther,
Would beat Apollo in a wooing match,
Curls, face and form and all.

VARTH.

Thou speak'st in riddles that I do not like ;
There's something dark behind them.

DRUIDESS.

Success will make them clear—'tis it transforms
Crime into crystal, and a diamond puts
Upon the dagger's point, that curious eyes,
Looking if there be any stains thereon,
May turn away bedazzled.

VARTH.

Thou, mother, art the ruler, but if blame
Should chance to come, 'tis I will have to bear it.

DRUIDESS.

Oh, coward forethought ! I will bear the blame.

VARTH.

What is thy business with the Northman yonder ?

DRUIDESS.

'Tis this—if all my other plans should fail,
I'll use the Northman as an instrument
To treat with those who are his countrymen,
For yielding up this island, on condition
That the sovereignty revert to us,
And be confirmed to our posterity.
My plans require this man to be set free,
On solemn oath that, ever afterwards,
He shall obey our bidding. Now I'll rouse him,
And you may leave me, sure that I'll succeed,
And, to our interest, turn his present need.

[*Exit Varth.*]

[*The Druidess awakes the Prisoner.*]

SAXO.

So then my hour is come ; 'tis well—I'm ready.

DRUIDESS.

Thy hour has not yet come, but I am come
To save thee if thou'lt have it so.

H

SAXO.

Who may'st thou be ? Thine is a woman's voice.

DRUIDESS.

A woman's voice should be attuned to mercy :
Mercy should have its home in woman's heart,
And ever perch itself on woman's lips,
Ready to wing its way to loftiest thrones,
To plead for lowliest suppliants.

SAXO.

I know thee now ; 'twas thou who urged my death
Before the Council yesterday.

DRUIDESS.

I did so out of spite to the Chief Druid,
And also that both he and thou should see
The power which, as Chief Druidess, is mine.
And now, to prove I meant not what I said,
I've hither come to offer thee thy life.

SAXO.

Thine is a complex soul—so late a tigress,
And now the embodiment of soft pity.
To save my life thou hast some end in view.
Speak out thy purpose ; why hast thou come here ?

DRUIDESS.

To save thy life, if thou wilt swear to me
To do my bidding in all time to come.

SAXO.

Then I refuse thine offer ; better death,
Than serve the whims of woman such as thou.
I see thou art an enemy of him
Who spoke a word for me before the Council,
And that thou hast some foul design to serve,
And wish to make me tool of thy revenge.
So, get thee gone ; a soldier and a man,
I will not purchase some brief years of life
At price of such ingratitude.

DRUIDESS.

Then take thy death, thou thick-skulled, stubborn
fool ;
Here come thine executioners.

[*Enter Guards, who remove the Prisoner from his cell, and
place him in the wicker-work image.*]

DRUIDESS.

Now let the Danish traitor die. His soul

I hereby doom to the infernal gods,
Whose hands are now stretched out to clutch at it.

SAXO.

Thou liest there, thou scorpion-breeding hag ;
I dare thee do thy worst, thou unsexed fury,
And now defy thee and the ravening fiend
Who fathered thee, and whom thou worshippest.

DRUIDESS.

Apply the torch, good friends, and silence him.

[*A soldier rushes forward with a torch.*]

[*Enter Ravlan.*]

RAVLAN.

Stay thy hand, soldier—give me up that torch.

[*Takes the torch from the soldier, and extinguishes it.*]

DRUIDESS.

What means this act, my lord ?

RAVLAN.

It means that I, Chief Druid, Prince of Britain,
Come hither by the bidding of the king

To exercise on his behalf, to-day,
His great prerogative of clemency.
Release the prisoner—his life is spared.

[*The Prisoner is released.*]

He will remain in Britain while the State
Requires his presence ; meantime, he is free,
And shall receive the usage of the Britons,
Who, when brave men are in adversity,
Extend to them the hand of fellowship,
For valour is a bond of brotherhood
That links us even to our enemies.

GUARDS.

Long live the King !—Long live the Prince of
Britain !

[*Exeunt.*]

ACT II.

SCENE I.—*Chamber in the Palace.*

[*Enter King and Ravlan.*]

KING.

A shadow rests upon my soul, to-day,
And breeds a host of dark and doleful fancies.

RAVLAN.

The body's least infirmity, my lord,
So clamours to the mind of what it suffers,
That the alarmed soul, in his citadel,
Where he keeps kindly-querulous sentinel,
Frets himself overmuch at what he hears,
And, lest disease should enter unawares,
Conjures up hosts of fancies, groundless fears,
Which, marshalled by his slave, Imagination,
Aids, rather than repels, the enemy.

KING.

A something speaks to me of coming danger,
A waking dream, in which presentiment
Talks with foreboding accents to my fears.

RAVLAN.

Sad thoughts are but sad dreams that come by day,
When the sick body gives them invitation,
And the mind is too weak to say them nay.

KING.

Presentiments and dreams both venture out,
Guided by some strange instinct of their own,
To explore the shadowy future, and return

Sometimes like lying couriers, other times
With warnings, truthful though oracular ;
But where they pick them up no man can tell,
No more than he can tell what guides the swallow
To scent the spring a thousand miles away,
The humblest insect to foreknow the rain,
The lowest plant to forefeel cloud and change,
Sooner and better than our sky-readers.
Then who dare say that man shall be denied
The prescience of bird, insect and poor herb
As to what's in the distance ? Shall he alone
Burrow his way in darkness, with no sign
Held up to him, in day or in the night,
To warn him of the changes of the morrow ?

[*Enter Kloof.*]

KLOOF.

Alas ! good Prince, alas ! this fearful errand
Takes almost from my tongue the power of speech :
Oh ! woeful day—would it had found me dead,
Or died itself within the womb of dawn.

RAVLAN.

Wherefore this grief, good Kloof ? Hath any one
Lifted his hand in wrath or jest against thee ?

KLOOF.

Oh, fools have friends, and know who are their
friends,
As speechless infants do, and e'en dumb brutes ;
Aye, there was one who long was friend to me,
And that real friend has gone, as real friends go,
Away from me too soon—away for ever.
I ne'er shall smile again, and if I do,
I pray that, on the instant, holy grief
May slay me on the spot, for treason done
Against the sacred majesty of Sorrow.

KING.

Some new phase of thy malady, poor Kloof.
But calm thyself, and be a man again ;
And tell us what it is that makes thee grieve ;
A poor man's grief is sacred as a King's,
And should have equal reverence.

KLOOF—*taking something from his wallet, and handing it
to Ravlan.*

My lords, there is the cause of all my woe :
It is more eloquent than words of mine.

RAVLAN.

Merciful Heaven ! It is my sister's hair.

Here are the pearls I gave her yesterday,
And there be stains on them—yea, stains of blood.
O ye kind Deities, who seek our worship !
I ask ye, could ye not have interposed
Between the implacable and murderous steel,
And a weak woman's bosom ?

KING.

Ravlan, good nephew, this last cruel stab
Hath pierced whatever morsel of my heart
That yet remained unwounded.
But, after all, this blood may not be hers :
A sudden grief jumps to extremities,
And will not hear of patience.

RAVLAN.

Talk to me not of passive patience now ;
Age, with its dried up feelings, may preach patience,
Because it long since hath forgotten suffering.
Patience is nothing but Self's heartless text
That age expounds to torture us withal.
I loved my sister Mavian, and she me
With love unutterable, which orphans feel,
And orphans only. Oh, Heaven ! 'tis hard
That she, a mother only some six moons,
Should, in the very blossom of her beauty,

In the first ecstasy of motherhood,
Her hand upon the golden key of Hope,
With which to ope the gate to future joy—
Should thus be dragged, as murder's sacrifice,
From me, from babe, from earth and everything.

KING.

Now, from my soul I pity thee. My niece
Was dear to me as if she were my daughter,
I thought two flowers would droop above my grave,
Thy sister Mavian and thyself, dear nephew.
But death hath blighted one, in dawn of bloom,
And breathed askance on me, but passed me by,
Who would have given him welcome.

RAVLAN.

I pray forgiveness, uncle, if my words
In any way did wound a heart which is
Already too much stricken. But, you know,
Grief is a wounded lion, and will tear
Himself, and every other thing in reach
He would have died for but an hour before.

KING.

Sorrow should be its own apologist ;
The words which in its wildness it may speak,

May startle, like the summer lightning's flash,
But like it, should pass harmlessly away.
Now let us question Kloof anent the way
He came by these sad relics.

RAVLAN.

His memory is nothing but a sieve,
And scarce will hold what passed an hour ago.

KING.

Good Kloof, I pray thee, by the love you bear
My nephew and myself, to tell us all
You may remember of the place and time
You found those tresses of my murdered niece.

KLOOF.

I was abroad this morn, before the lark
Had left his nest-mate's side, and took my way
Straight for the grove that stands beside the sea,
For in it was a nest whose half-fledged young
I fed each eve with food that served till morn.
The nest was gone, and the two parent birds
Sat mourning with drooped wings.

RAVLAN.

My lord, I told you what his memory was—

'Tis wandering now upon a nest of birds,
And next he'll tell us of a rabbit-burrow.

KING.

Let him continue—if he lose the thread
That guides his recollection, we lose all.

KLOOF.

Searching around, I saw what killed my birds,
A huge black cat, with eyes like burning pebbles.
I chased her to a cavern near at hand,
And here I saw a mantle on the sand,
And knew it by the broidered mistletoe
To be the Princess Mavian's ; looking round,
I found those tresses, guided by their pearls,
Which shone like snow upon a raven's wing.

RAVLAN.

'Tis murder, hideous plain, as if the word
Were writ against the sky in lines of fire.

KLOOF—(*handing his cap and bells to the King.*)

There is no more of mirth for me, my lord,
Till I avenge this murder ; and herewith
I do resign my proud and envied office
As jester of your court—aye, even a jester

Is envied for his station at a court.
So now farewell, my lords ; I must henceforth
Make friends with satire and break off with folly.

[*Exit Kloof.*]

RAVLAN.

His head is turned, and mine will be the same
If I let this rest here. I'm almost shamed
That this poor jester so out-sorrows me,
And that his grief hath so usurped his soul,
That he resigns his dearest ornaments
For sake of one who simply did befriend him.
But from this hour, adieu the things of State,—
To grief, revenge, my soul is consecrate.

[*Exeunt King and Ravlan.*]

SCENE II.—*Night.—A Cave.—Witches.*

[*All the Witches sing.*]

Night for us unlocks her treasure,
Gives us weapons at our pleasure,
To work our vengeance without measure.

The more the ruin and disaster,
The warmer welcome from our Master.

When we hear the screech-owl hooting,
See the midnight meteors shooting,
The death-lights o'er the moorlands flying,
To fright the well and rack the dying,
That is our hour.

When the world and woods are sleeping,
When the loathsome snakes are creeping,
When the thick air plagues is breeding,
Grave worms riddling, henbane seeding,
Then we have power.

[*Enter Druidess.*]

ALL THE WITCHES.

All hail, great mother !

DRUIDESS.

Power be to ye, daughters !

FIRST WITCH.

Mother ! further power bestow us,
O'er things above, around, below us,
That all may feel, and none may know us.

DRUIDESS.

Daughters each, my power is thine,
When our Master gives the sign.

SECOND WITCH.

Hail to thee, mother ! may thy power
Double on us, as our dower.

DRUIDESS.

Wormwood, since last we met, what hast thou done ?

WORMWOOD.

One beauteous damsel, on her wedding morn,
I smote with blotches and red running sores,
So that the would-be bridegroom, when he saw
The face he worshipped dotted o'er with scabs,
Fainted with very loathing : ere night came,
In a foul horsepond did they find her smothered.
I've left a score of rosy, ripening maidens,
Whose cheeks, when first I saw them, shamed the
 peach,
For soft, delicious beauty—I have left them
So putrid and so pitted o'er with sores,
Their lovers might protest the vengeful asp
Had hatched her eggs in every ulcer's nest

DRUIDESS.

And what hast thou done, Catsclaw ?

CATSCRAW.

I've stolen from their mother's arms two babes,
And left two hideous changelings in their place ;
I would have clawed a third one, yesternight,
But that it sneezed, and then, as quick as light,
Its mother bade " God bless it."

DRUIDESS.

And what hast thou done, Toadstool ?

TOADSTOOL.

In one whole county I have cursed the cattle,
Have sent the murrain on the wholesome cows,
Rot on the sheep, and mildew on the crops,
Croup on the babes, consumption on the maids,
Sickness upon the wives, and in their husbands
I have worked up a yeast of jealousy
That keeps their blood a-frothing day and night,
Till it boil o'er in madness.

DRUIDESS.

You've all done well, and now's the hour
To test your works and prove my power.

[The Druidess produces a wax image of Ravlan, and a human skull, in which she kindles a fire.]

DRUIDESS.

This is Ravlan's father's skull,
Keep it flaming, keep it full ;
Every time the flame decreases
So much pain in Ravlan ceases ;
Every time the flame ascends,
One pain the more his forehead rends.
Thus his flesh doth feel the fire
That burns the temples of his sire.
First the dagger, then the torch,
Wound with steel, then scar and scorch.

[The Witches go over to the wax image ; each of them plunges a dagger into it—then applies her torch.]

DRUIDESS—*(stabbing the image in the forehead.)*

Here I stab thee to the brain,
Let the rankling wound remain,
Ever causing cureless pain ;
And wherever thou may'st be,
On the dry land or the sea,
May the Demon make thee feel
Pang of fire and pain of steel.

FIRST AND SECOND WITCHES (*burning the image with their torches.*)

Here we brand thee on the brow,
Let all beauty fly thee now ;
And may'st thou ne'er henceforward find
Grace of body, peace of mind.

THIRD WITCH—(*applying her torch.*)

Here I brand thee on the cheek,
Let it wither week by week ;
Till each, hollowed like a cave,
For beauty make a sapless grave.

[*The Witches here place the wax figure on its back, thrust bodkins into its breast, and leave them there. Afterwards they apply their torches.*]

DRUIDESS.

While these bodkins here remain,
Ravlan shall consume in pain ;
Slowly waste before our sight,
Freeze by day and burn by night.

[*The Druidess places the burning skull on the bosom of the wax figure, and slowly extinguishes it.*]

DRUIDESS AND WITCHES. [*They sing.*]

Like this waste and empty skull,
Be Ravlan's ere the moon is full ;
If, at this hour he be asleep,
Let terror all his senses steep,
O'er him as many horrors sweep
As o'er this skull shall grave-worms creep,
When in the corpse-pit damp and deep.
Let the Nightmare crush and grieve him,
Visions rack him, fiends deceive him,
Nor from their thralls let sleep relieve him.
By all the spells that we have done
'Twixt waning moon and rising sun ;
By what we've lost, and what we've won
Since our long contract was begun
With him whom none dare look upon,
Save those who Heaven and Hope would shun—
We conjure thee to leave thy lair,
O Spirit of the midnight air !
And Ravlan's evil genius bring,
That we may do some questioning.
Haste ! and to-morrow night we'll bring,
Both tears and blood to smooth thy wing.

[*Darkness —Thunder and lightning.*]

[*Enter Apparition in dress of Ravlan, but wearing a mask.*]

DRUIDESS.

Speak words of joy, or words of fear—
Evil Genius, we will hear.

APPARITION.

I am the evil genius of the Prince,
Who now lies in a deep and dreadful dream.

DRUIDESS.

Ha! sisters, mark! our spells do work already.

APPARITION.

The nightmare's hoofs are pounding heart and brain,
And I was standing gulping down his moans,
When your dread messenger made entrance.
But wherefore have ye called me from my feast,
For, like yourselves, I fatten upon suffering?

DRUIDESS.

I called thee, that thou might'st disclose to me
If Ravlan e'er shall wear the crown of Britain.

APPARITION.

If ever Ravlan wear the crown,
Death will smile and Fate will frown;

But more to tell thee is not mine,
Save, on that day, his fate is thine.

[*Apparition vanishes.*]

[*Druidess and Witches sing.*]

Sisters all, 'tis time to go,
The cock is now about to crow,
And follow weal, or follow woe,
We've paid enough for what we know.

[*Exeunt.*]

SCENE III.—*A wood.*

[*Enter Varth and two Murderers.*]

FIRST MURDERER.

Good news, my lord, the deed is surely done !
And everything that could disclose a crime
Is covered with oblivion's winding-sheet.

VARTH.

Villain ! what mean'st by saying surely done ?
Did I not tell thee to preserve her life,
While sending her to exile on the sea ?

SECOND MURDERER.

My lord, your mother ordered otherwise,
And told us if your wife were left alive,
She'd have us flayed.

VARTH.

Alas ! alas ! Would exile not suffice ?
A starving crocodile would ask no more
Than what would silence present appetite.

FIRST MURDERER.

I don't know 'bout a crocodile, my lord ;
But if he kill for payment, then I say,
He'd not take less than twice his weight in gold
To do what we have done.

VARTH.

O cursed day I ever saw the light !

SECOND MURDERER.

My lord, we exercised as little cruelty
As was compatible with our commands.
We're not by nature cruel, but 'tis others,
More cowardly than we, who make us so.

VARTH.

Ruffian, dost call me coward—me a coward ?

(Seizes him by the throat.)

Accuse me not of what you both have done.

I had no share in, nor imagined it.

But I release thee, for a common crime

(Relaxes his hold.)

Makes murderers the equals of a prince,

And leaves him at their mercy.

[Enter Druidess and Thorwolf.]

DRUIDESS.

Good-day, my son, and you, brave gentlemen,

I hope that Fortune smiles upon your valour.

FIRST MURDERER.

I'd like to have my knife at Fortune's throat.

SECOND MURDERER.

And I would like to guide it.

THORWOLF.

These gallant men, like soldiers now-a-days,

Have little recompense for what they do.

But ere long times will change, and better days
Will follow on the change for all of us.

FIRST MURDERER.

Change cannot make me worse, for desperate men
Grow fat on change, like toads that starve to day
On meadow air, and on the morrow suck
The yeasty breath of green and slimy pools,
Whose festering mud breeds slugs and pestilence.

SECOND MURDERER.

We should have as fair share of hero-homage
For what we do within our humble sphere,
As any king, who, for some leagues of land,
Paves half a continent with human skulls,
Ignorant, at the time, that laughing fiends
Are busy gathering up the poor, smashed bones,
Wherewith to make the warrior a slide,
Down which to whiz him into Tartarus.

THORWOLF.

There's no more use for priests, since Satan's self
Can read a homily on humanity,
And preach 'gainst shedding blood.

SECOND MURDERER.

They preach the best, my lord, who've dabbled in
The sin 'gainst which they thunder.

DRUIDESS.

Now to the point, good sirs,—how prospered ye ?

FIRST MURDERER.

Success has given the lie to those who say
That armoured innocence is proof 'gainst cunning.
We lured the Princess to the wooded shore,
By telling her a foundling babe we saw
By some unnatural mother cast away
Upon the rasping, chill and oozy sand,
From which the white tusks of the howling sea
Were tearing ravenous mouthfuls every second.
With flying feet she hastened to the spot,—
We seized her, bound her, knocked her on the head,
Thrust her into a skiff we had at hand,
Stove in the side, and then we pushed it off,
To sink at leisure 'mongst the watchful sharks,
And give them a rare morsel.

DRUIDESS.

Show me a proof your errand did succeed.

SECOND MURDERER.

Here are some tresses I was loath to shear
From brow as fair as e'er heaven smiled upon.

[*Hands her the tresses.*]

DRUIDESS.

She hath bewitched thee, fool ! Curse on her charms.
I paid thee not for praising them.

[*Tramples on the tresses.*]

VARTH.

In vain you curse her now, for angel lips
Bless her, as they will bless not me nor thee.

DRUIDESS.

'Tis pity that the angels have not thee,
Or the fiends rather, if that the fiends would
Bestow their dirtiest dunghill on a coward.

VARTH.

Rail on ; I cannot fight against my fate,
And must bear all thou choose to put on me.

[*Exit Varth.*]

DRUIDESS.

Now, gentlemen, you've fairly won my praise,
And more substantial gratitude in gold ;
But much more gold I'll shower upon ye both
If now to Thorwolf and me ye vow
That any person in the realm of Britain
Ye will take off whenever we command.

FIRST MURDERER.

I vow and swear obedience.

SECOND MURDERER.

And I make double vow and double oath.

DRUIDESS.

I trust ye both, and am well satisfied ;
So here's a packet—open it to-night—
You'll find in it directions adequate
For the great deed we wish you to perform.

FIRST MURDERER.

I hope the business is not like the last ;
For what we've done of late will smear our souls
With everlasting pitch, and this new deed
May change them into everlasting torches,
To light the fiends when coming to our torture.

SECOND MURDERER.

Yea, we have souls to put in jeopardy,
Now that I think on't.

THORWOLF.

Your souls concern yourselves ; your bodies, us.

[Enter Kloof.]

[He taps the Second Murderer on the shoulder.]

KLOOF.

Stop, ruffian, I would have a word with thee.

SECOND MURDERER.

Begone, base jester, lest I break thy bones.

THORWOLF.

Whence this new madness, Kloof?

KLOOF.

This morn he snatched from out my doublet's breast,
A keepsake which the Princess Mavian gave me ;
And when, with tears, I begged it back again,
He flung it in the mud, and trampled it.
For this I've searched him out to fight with him,
Not for mine own sake, but her memory.

SECOND MURDERER.

Foul fool and knave, I'll slice thee into shreds,
To feed your birds withal.

KLOOF.

Thou liest, cut-throat, I'm no jester-fool
Since Mavian, my good Princess, passed away ;
And much I am mistaken if thy hand
Is guiltless of her slaughter.

SECOND MURDERER.

Infamous jester, now thou'lt die the death.

[Draws and rushes at Kloof.]

KLOOF.

Butcher and hang-dog, ask thy fiends to guard
thee ;
For though a fool, I once was good at fence.

[They fight, and the Second Murderer falls.]

[Exeunt.]

SCENE IV.—*A Chamber in the Palace*

[*Enter Druidess and Aidnai.*]

DRUIDESS.

I am here to ask thee dost thou love me, Aidnai ?

AIDNAI.

I love thee better than myself, dear mother.

DRUIDESS.

In thy affections do I stand as high
As I have heard of Ravlan ?

AIDNAI.

Thou art my mother, and hast prior claim
To love as well as reverence.

DRUIDESS.

If, then, thou lovest me, thou needs must hate
Whoever I may hold in detestation.

AIDNAI.

Hate, on thy lips, is nothing but a word,
And in thy heart has no reality.

DRUIDESS.

Poor simpleton, hast thou not learnt by now
That none can hate like woman ?

AIDNAL.

No one hath done me wrong, and therefore hate
Is something that I know not, and the word
Is but a serpent's hiss within mine ear ;
But, then, the thing that hisseth I've not seen,
And never wish to know its form or colour.

DRUIDESS.

Thou knowest Ravlan is mine enemy,
And surely 'tis not natural my daughter
Should love what I abhor ?

AIDNAL.

Ravlan hath never whispered in mine ear
A word of spite against thee; or said aught
But what a daughter might with pleasure hear.

DRUIDESS.

Believe him not—he had an end in view.
Lovers would praise the Fiend to gain his daughter ;
Lovers are liars, women always dupes,

And on their innocent heads the Fates make fall
The vengeance due their tempter's perjury.

AIDNAI.

Both thou and I know Ravlan of old,
And little as I know of life or love,
Of hate or treachery, or ways of men,
I dare to say, before the blessed Gods,
That I would stake my life, aye, twenty lives,
On Ravlan's word, for it is truth itself,
And he the very foster-son of Honour.

DRUIDESS.

Thou dost not hate him, then ?

AIDNAI.

How can I hate until I see the evil ?

DRUIDESS.

Then 'tis a mongrel love you bear me, girl—
A bastard love, that springs not from the heart,
But from the head, and its base parentage
It owes to fear, and habit of subjection.

AIDNAI.

I know not what you mean—I might as well
Guess what the whispering and mysterious winds

Say to the yew trees that o'erhang the dead ;
And, as these winds may well be chiding spirits,
So may the words you now address to me,
For fearfully they move me.

DRUIDESS.

I do repent me, daughter, for my speech,
But I did speak it out of love for thee.
I now perceive the Prince hath won thy heart,
A prize a thousand times beyond the crown
He one day will inherit from his uncle.
Now, 'tis my duty to watch over thee,
And for thy future make a fair provision.
I am deeper versed in love tests than thou art,
And I will test the Prince in thine own presence,
And find out if he love thee : in such test,
'Tis needful that thou shouldst perform thy part.

AIDNAI.

Would such an act be maidenly, dear mother ?

DRUIDESS.

It is, sweet Aidnai—leave it all to me.
My plan is this—I know, by happy chance,
At certain seasons Ravlan walks in sleep,

And then, if he be questioned, will disclose
The deepest secrets of his inmost soul.
Some few nights hence, he sleeps within his temple,
As is his custom at this time of year.
We'll watch him—I from out a hiding place—
And, when the walking fit possesses him,
Thou wilt accost him—offer him a crown,
And ask him if he will consent to wear it
If thou shouldst marry him ; if he say yea,
Then will he show part proof he loveth thee.
Then ask him if thy life is more to him
Than is the King's, his uncle's. Mark him then.
And if he answer as he did before,
I'll want no more; it will be proof enough
He loves thee dearly, and I'll give consent
To the desire all women hug to death,
The unappeasable desire of marriage.

AIDNAL.

I have no strong desire for marriage, mother.
On woman's side it is a game with Fate,
And very often Fate o'ermatches her,
And turns her confidence into a sword
With which he stabs her Future to the heart,
And leaves the weapon in the cruel wound
To keep it wide her lifetime.

DRUIDESS.

True, my dear Aidnai—but what of my plan ?

AIDNAI.

I know not whether good may come of it ;
'Tis not for me to judge ; but I may say,
To take advantage of infirmity
Is foreign to the nature of a woman,
And amongst men I think but few would do it.

DRUIDESS.

Thou art an infant still, and must be guided.
I am thy guide ; my plan is for thy good,
And thou wilt bless me for it all thy life.
Come now, and give me the obedient kiss,
And then thou may'st depart.

[*Aidnai kisses her, and exit.*]

DRUIDESS.

Now do I float on flood-tide of success
Toward the haven of my fondest hopes,
And each event, springing from accident,
Pushes along the barque of my design,
Which cleaves so gloriously through seas of change,

That I, who stand with hand upon the helm,
Feel my soul swelling while I'm borne along
As gallantly as if I did bestride
That darting dolphin, Fortune.
Now shall I ruin Ravlan with the king ;
I'll tell him that his nephew seeks his life,
And, when the Prince is walking in his sleep,
I'll have the king beside me in the temple ;
And if that doating girl but play her part,
He'll hear from Ravlan's lips the strongest proof
His love for her outweighs the royal life.
Then may the king resolve upon his death,
Old men being jealous of prerogative ;
Or, if he spare the Prince, may banish him.
Perhaps this may be cowardice in me,
But I prefer the king should have him slain,
Ere Thorwolf, in my plan, shall slay the king ;
For the foul spectre that I summoned up,
Hath somewhat shaken my first stern resolve
To have the life of Ravlan myself,
And taste the sweetness of revenge alone.
I well remember what the spectre said :
" If ever Ravlan wear the crown,
Death will smile and Fate will frown ;
But more to tell thee is not mine,
Save on that day his fate is thine."

There's more in these few words than pleases me ;
So, from the crown I will Prince Ravlan keep,
For if Death smile and Fate frown on that day,
And aught of ill befall him, my fate, too,
Might be the very counterpart of his.
So, come what may, I'll try the present scheme,
For Fortune's barque oft floats on nearest stream.
[*Exit.*]

SCENE V.—(*Ravlan asleep before his altar in the temple ; Enter King and Druidess.*)

DRUIDESS.

My lord, he has his heart on life and crown,
And, if I do not prove it presently,
Then order me to death to-morrow morn.

KING.

I've offered Ravlan the crown already,
But he refused, and with such loving words,
That I believed him a pure paragon
Of all that was unselfish.

DRUIDESS.

He had some deep design in that, my lord—

Some treason, like a snake that hid itself
Behind a screen of words that smelt like flowers,
And stole away your senses, fooled your eyes
With odours rich and lustres manifold.

KING.

When Ravlan walks in sleep, his eyes being open,
Are all his senses sealed save sight and speech?

DRUIDESS.

His senses are congealed, and then his eyes
Tell to his mind no more of what they see,
Than does the ice upon the winter brook
Disclose, unto the pulsing stream beneath,
The changeful aspects of the cloud that passes.

KING.

But will he speak so we may learn his thoughts.

DRUIDESS.

Aye, that he will, if some one question him.
That walking fit of his is nothing more
Than a transparency of nervous sleep,
Through which the soul stands obvious to the view,
And the mosaics of the mental temple,
The secret currents of the heart's desires,

The very well-springs of the deepest thoughts,
The motives of all actions—everything
Will stand as clear revealed to you and me,
As doth a sunny landscape at high noon,
Seen from a mistless mountain.

KING.

Here comes thy daughter ; what dost thou propose ?

DRUIDESS.

I've taught her what to say,—let's hide ourselves,
Where we can use our ears as well as eyes.

[*Enter Aidnai, bearing a crown and veiled ; the King and
Druidess hide themselves.*]

AIDNAI.

I do not like this test—'tis not for me,
Who oft have heard the Prince proclaim his love,
Thus to beset him, and at unawares
Wring from his lips, for other ears than mine,
That which should surely meet mine ears alone.
And if, in other days, we chance to wed,
How could I keep this from him—how conceal
That I came in the night-time, like a thief,
Whom his friend took in day-time to his heart,

And stole from that dear friend, who trusted him,
A jewel he kept hid from all the world,
Save from the pilferer, who abroad displays it,
Knowing his friend, for love's sake, would not say
The thief had not the gem in keeping always.
Oh, mother, this thing pains me to the soul ;
My heart appeals to me the act's not right
That's done when day and sense are both asleep ;
Better displease my parent than my conscience—
So now I'll break my bargain.

[Throws down the crown and runs away ; the Druidess pursues her in vain ; returning, she personates Aidnai, but veils herself.]

RAVLAN—*(waking up and rising to his feet.)*

I hear some noise—can it be thundering ?
There were no signs of any storm last night ;
The winds, at sunset, made no sound more rude
Than does a mother's lips when they dissolve
A song of maiden days in lullabies,
As her babe's eyes are closing.

DRUIDESS—*(advancing.)*

How is my Lord Raylan ?

RAVLAN.

Ha! ha! the winds begin to shriek, methinks;
I pity the poor souls upon the deep;
God help the houseless child a night like this—
When I am king, all children shall be clothed.

DRUIDESS—(*aside to the king.*)

Ha! mark you that, my lord—"when he is king.

RAVLAN.

The blasts grow louder—I will to the shore:
These gusts, like knives, will rip the sails of ships,
Tear up our cottages, drown those inside.
'Tis pity that a cottage has no anchor;
But anchors would not hold in soft, green grass,—
I'll to the shore, mayhap I'll save some lives.

[*The Druidess hands him the crown, but he lets it fall.*]

What use can that bright bauble be to me?
Will the wild storm to-night respect a crown?

(*To the Druidess.*)

Ha! my poor soul, hast thou been shipwrecked?
How many have escaped? Where be thy children?

DRUIDESS.

Dost know me, Ravlan? Am I not called Aidnai?

RAVLAN.

Is Aidnai shipwrecked, too ? then must I save her.

[*Begins to walk.*]

DRUIDESS.

She is not shipwrecked, but 'twere well for her
She were a hundred fathoms deep to-night.

RAVLAN—(*stopping again.*)

There was a storm,—it seems to have gone down,
And I must know if Aidnai have escaped ?

DRUIDESS.

If I wed thee, would'st thou take the crown ?

RAVLAN.

Aye, to-morrow morn.

DRUIDESS—(*aside.*)

I pray and hope, my lord, you mind that answer.

RAVLAN.

The blast gets up again,—'twill drown my Aidnai.

DRUIDESS.

Is Aidnai's life more dear to thee than his
Who is thy King and uncle ?

RAVLAN.

Aye, fifty times more dear to me than his,
A hundred times far dearer than mine own.

DRUIDESS.

If Aidnai and the King were shipwrecked, both,
Whom would'st thou save the first ?

RAVLAN.

Aidnai before the world—but now I go.
I must unto the shore to see her safe,
Or else to die with her.

[*He walks away. The King comes from his hiding-place.*]

DRUIDESS.

Now art thou fully satisfied, my lord ?
You've heard his secrets, and they fairly show
Your crown, yea, even sacred life, itself,
Would not weigh one poor feather in the scale
Against the wish of Aidnai. Now, I think,
Such foul, unnatural treason 'gainst an uncle,
Who has been to him even more than father,
Deserves at least, say—death or banishment.

KING.

I'll think, to-night, what course I will pursue
As to my nephew.—Meantime, give command
To have him followed, lest he meet with danger.

[*Exit King.*]

DRUIDESS.

Old fool, and worst of fools, he loves him still.

[*Exit Druidess.*]

ACT III.

SCENE I.—*A Wood.*—*Kloof trying to build a house of sods.*

[*Enter Saxo.*]

SAXO.

Thou art a skilful builder, my good Kloof ;
It must be long since thou didst learn thy trade.

KLOOF.

A man of genius must know many trades,

For if he try to live by one alone,
His chances of starvation are made sure.
He must be various as his knowledge is—
Be able just as well to build a hut
As hold the quivering balance of the State,
When ponderous selfishness weighs down the scale
In which floats airy honesty.

SAXO.

Art thou a man of genius, Kloof?

KLOOF.

Every fool now accounts himself as such,
And why not I? But tell me, gallant sir,
Is not thy trade that of a fighting man?

SAXO.

I am a soldier, Kloof, but what of that?

KLOOF.

Well, if thou canst not rob as well as slay,
Thou art no man of genius, or, what's worse,
An honest man that goes unrecognised.

SAXO.

If thou wert in my native city, Kloof,

Thousands would crowd to see thee every day,
And hail a jester turned philosopher.

KLOOF.

The best philosophers are only jesters,
Who upon ignorance build up their fame,
And throwing dust before the eyes of men,
Seem, through the misty curtain that they raise,
Not pigmies magnified, but demi-gods.
Philosophers, forsooth ! I challenge them
To tell me why that I, with arms and hands,
And my experience and brains to boot,
Am beaten in the building of a house,
Even by an insect not a thumb-nail long ?
The humble bee of swift, sad summer time.

SAXO.

To be a fool, thou art the king of puzzles.

KLOOF.

Kings are the greatest puzzles in the world,
And have been puzzling men since Noah's flood,
But never been found out, and never will
Till all the blockheads in the world are dead :
Which day, I hope I never may behold,
For I'd be 'mongst the number.

SAXO.

If that be treason, there is caution in it.

KLOOF.

Treason, good sir, is caution come too late ;
Is caution, turned to desperation, when
It sees the chance of gaining what it lost
By its own cowardice, gone by for ever.

SAXO.

Dost thou know Aidnai ?

KLOOF.

Is she the daughter of the Druidess ?

SAXO.

She is the same—is she not very fair ?

KLOOF.

A peacock's tail is fair, but what's the use ?
A lark's is not so gaudy, yet he sings.

SAXO.

Is not Prince Ravlan in love with her ?

KLOOF.

I'd marry her myself if I were wealthy.

SAXO.

She would not marry thee, and leave the Prince.
Now tell me if I'm wrong in that or not.

KLOOF.

A fool succeeds much better with a woman
Than a wise man can e'er expect to do.
A fluent tongue is more than match for brains
When you go wooing : I have found it so ;
Wherefore, take care, both Ravlan and you,
Lest, if I set my mind on glorious Aidnai,
I win her from you both.

SAXO.

Poor Kloof, I pity thee,—some sense thou hast ;
Thy faculties are sometimes sharp enough,
But 'tis at fearful price that they are so,—
The absence or the quiescence of judgment.
For, to imagine what's impossible,
And build up castles, with our eyes awake,
Shows there's a touch of madness in the brain.
'Tis so with thee, poor Kloof, and 'tis not right
To set thy fancy flying off with thee,
And so I'll leave thee to thy present task.

[*Exit Saxo.*]

KLOOF.

That man loves Aidnai, and full sure I am
'Twill breed ill-will between him and the Prince.
And if the girl's mother like the Northman,
The Briton will be conquered and undone.

[*Enter Songfond, the Bard.*]

SONGFOND.

Good Kloof, I feel there's something in the air.

KLOOF.

That's pedlar's news, and is as old, good sir,
As slander is ; yea, it was hawked about
Not many years succeeding the first courtship.

BARD.

I heard strange sounds last night ; and notes of woe,
Solemnly soft, like tones of funeral bells
Stealing across the waters, filled mine ears
Throughout the sleepless watches of the night,
And made me feel forebodings I've not known
Since good King Ravlan perished, years ago.

KLOOF.

What about King Ravlan ? Did I know the man ?

K

You call him good. The children, then, should wear his likeness round their necks, as an amulet against treason. Their fathers also should swear by his name. In this latter way might his memory be best preserved, as remembrance of the dead lives not so long as a fashionable oath, or a kennel bye-word that is fathered by the tongue of a nobleman. Ha ! ha ! ha ! There's the philosophy of immortality in these days. So barren of deeds deserving it.

BARD.

Oh, would to Heaven that madness, like the tide,
Would rise and fall at stated intervals,
And not surprise and vex us at the time
We least expect its coming.

[*Enter apparition of King Athelstane.*]

KLOOF.

What's that ? Ha ! ha ! Look there—here is the
King !
My lord, what want you here ? You know full well
This is not court, and I no more am jester.
If come to see my palace, welcome then :
'Tis built of sods, as our last home must be ;

But if you fear not soiling of your robes,
You have a loving welcome. Ha ! ha ! ha !

[*Apparition vanishes.*]

BARD.

Oh, 'tis the King's wraith that we have beheld ;
Now Heaven be good to him his end is near.

KLOOF.

The King should not have taken such speedy offence
at his old jester, and left so hurriedly. Alas ! his temper hath sadly changed since I gave up mine office ; and so, perhaps, the absence of a fool in a court may injure King and Kingdom.

BARD.

Alas ! poor Kloof, thou know'st not what I say,
And I know not whom I should pity most,
The king or the poor simpleton.

KLOOF.

Come let us hunt cats. It was a cat devoured my young birds, and the Princess Mavian, and Ravlan. Wherefore, let us go and wage war against all the cats in farm and forest. Let us give the rats a holiday.

Then shall our farmers have something to curse besides cheapness. Then shall they be a prey to the tax-gatherer and the rats. Come let us hunt, for there is glory, now-a-days, even in the slaughter of the noblest of God's four-footed creatures, from the deer, with plaintive eyes, half human, to the big, mild elephant, who hath more rational and noble traits about him than those who walk upon two feet, usurp the name of men, and, without reason, murder him.

[*Exeunt.*]

SCENE TWO.—*A room in the Palace.*

[*Enter Ravlan and Aidnai.*]

RAVLAN.

What makes thee look so sad to-day, dear Aidnai?

AIDNAI.

The cause, my lord, if it were told to thee,
Would make thee hate me to thy latest day.

RAVLAN.

Nay, that could never be—hate thee, indeed?
Now, by my faith, thy whims are fooling thee,

Causing thy thoughts to wander in their flight,
Like bees that lose their queen, or apple blooms
Playing at truant with the soft south wind,
Which, after having coaxed them from the trees,
Beguiles and wafts them everywhere.

AIDNAI.

Let not my sadness weigh with thee, my lord ;
For, when we cannot make another happy,
'Tis not a friendly part to make him sorrow.

RAVLAN.

Thou keep'st thy secret sorrows well, dear Aidnai ;
I would that all of mine were in thy keeping,
And that I were along with them myself.

AIDNAI.

I am too young to take such charge, my lord,
And will be so for many a day to come.

RAVLAN.

Aidnai, I fear that thou wilt never love me.

AIDNAI.

I should love everything, because I feel
That almost every creature seeks for love ;

And as we treat it, adds unto our pleasure.
For our delight the brave and songful lark
Mounts heavenward, with his treasure-trove of
 mirth,
To vaunt before the unseen choristers
That waft the singing morning breeze to earth,
The gleeful glories of his meadow music.
For this I love him, and along with him
The faithful hound, whose big, fond heart doth
 feed
On a caress, and lives but for his master.
And next there comes the proud and patient steed,
Which willingly for us yields freedom up,
And, like a meek-eyed giant, deigns to serve us,
And him I love ; nor anything can hate,
From the fierce lion that affrights the woods,
Down to the little mouse, whose humble life,
Which is as dear to him as ours to us,
Is staked on every meal. So, if we wish
To wind up pleasantly this skein of life,
The way is to endear ourselves to others,
And thus live in the memory of friends,
Which is that only after-life on earth
That costs not war and orphans, tears and toil,
Racked brains by day, and vigils drear by night,

But may be bought by what a child can give,—
A smile, a word, a small sweet deed of kindness.

[*Enter Messenger.*]

MESSENGER.

Ravlan ! my lord ! oh, that the earth would yawn
And swallow me, if that my grave would prove
An opening to perdition for the fiends
Who've slain the King, thine uncle.

RAVLAN.

Merciful Heaven ! the King, mine uncle, slain ?
My sister and my uncle both together !
Oh, 'tis too much—what have I done for this,
That Destiny and Murder, hand in hand,
Should search me out 'mongst millions, and strike
home,
In the most tender portion of my heart,
And cleave it past all reach of remedy ?
Would that I could go mad, but that poor solace
I need not pray for. Farewell, sweet Aidnai,
Forget me not while absent. Now I go
To woo red vengeance, and to wed with woe.

[*Exeunt.*]

SCENE III. — *A Grove.**[Enter Druidess and Varth.]*

VARTH.

Mother, the deed is done—the King is dead !

DRUIDESS.

Curse on the hasty, headstrong fool who did it,
And struck the blow without consulting me.
He almost marred the plans of many years
In one wild moment. O, treacherous cur !
He fancied that, because he's General,
And hath the ear of officers and men,
They would at once invest him with the crown,
When they heard tidings of the monarch's death.
But he hath failed—my friends are more than his,
Both in the nation and the nation's armies.

VARTH.

Wherein hath Thorwolf erred so much in haste ?

DRUIDESS.

Because the King did almost promise me
To send his nephew into distant exile,
And to bequeath the crown to thee, my son,
In presence of the nobles of the kingdom;

He would have done so two short days from now,
But that the treacherous felon, Thorwolf,
Has, for his own base interest, ta'en him off.

Meanwhile, I have the royal signet-ring,

[Shows the ring.]

As warrant, should some mishap intervene
Before the day he would appoint you heir,
That I should have the power to name you king
In preference to any in the realm.

VARTH.

Thou hast done wonders, but, I fear me much,
I'm not the man to rule the land with vigour.

DRUIDESS.

I know it well, but ease thy mind on that,
For I shall rule the land from o'er your shoulder,
And also be your guide in everything,
Even to the way in which you set your crown,
The way you wear your cloak or cut your hair,
The mode you wage a war or make a peace.

VARTH.

Such love as thine was never yet excelled,
Since our first mother nursed her first-born son ;
But surely thou hast not forgotten Aidnai ?

DRUIDESS.

I'll see to her—but daughters never claim
Half as much love as sons, for women can't
Waste all their love on women.

VARTH.

When wilt thou show the warrant that thou hast
To place me o'er the kingdom ?

DRUIDESS.

At the old king's funeral.

VARTH.

But is not Thorwolf sure to thwart thee there ?

DRUIDESS.

Aye, let him. If he dare to lift his eyebrows !
I'll charge him with the murder on the spot,
And have him torn to pieces.

VARTH.

Do not the people seem to mourn the king ?

DRUIDESS.

Some men are far more popular in death

Than ever they had been in all their life.
Now, until next we meet, bear well in mind
That, at the moment I proclaim thee king,
Thou manifest a sorrowful surprise :
Burst into tears, and with a trembling voice,
Pretend that thou dost not desire the crown,
For tears and seeming-sorrow at right time,
Oft cloak the worst designs and cover crime.

[*Exeunt.*]

SCENE IV.—*Enter procession, with the body of the king on a bier. Ravlan, Thorwolf, Druidess, Varth, soldiers, citizens, etc.*

THORWOLF.

So the old king is dead. Farewell, good master !
Would I could serve thee, now that thou art gone,
As I did always in thy days of life ;
If so, I'd show my love in tracking out,
Alone and single-handed, through the world,
The murderers who spilled thy royal blood,
And poured it out with but as little thought
As if it were a beggar's, not a king's.

RAVLAN.

Brave Thorwolf, you have served my uncle well,
And he reposed on you beyond most others ;
But could those poor, dumb, lifeless lips speak out,
'Twould be to tell thee this : "The dead seek not
That slaughterous revenge the living deem
Is due the passive, unprotesting body,
Whose open wounds do preach against revenge,
As having caused those very wounds themselves."

DRUIDESS.

Ravlan, thou hast not yet informed the State
How thy lamented uncle met his end.

RAVLAN.

The story is as brief as it is bloody.
At sunset he was walking on his terrace,
Whose western slope looks down upon the wood,
When a swift arrow, whizzing through the air,
Struck him full in the heart—then down he fell :
And his attendants, running to the spot,
Straightway plucked out the weapon from the wound ;
Whereon, the old man, life fast bulging out,
Smiled a faint smile, said " thanks " unto his ser-
vants,

And with this kingly courtesy, spoke no more ;
But turned his face from the encrimsoned west,
And died as dies a gentleman and king.

THORWOLF.

It now behoves the State that we should know
To whom the king bequeathed the crown of Britain.

RAVLAN.

My uncle, ere his death, took umbrage at me,
From some cause I have failed to ascertain.
So I know not to whom he willed the crown ;
But this I know, the time is not long past
Since I refused it, much against his pleasure.

DRUIDESS.

Some days ago the king gave me this ring ;

[*Shows it.*]

And having a presentiment of evil,
And that he could not call the States in time
To name to them the man who should succeed,
Desired me, if he met a sudden death,
Which, being so old, he looked for every day,
To give this ring unto the man whose name
He then confided to my ear alone.

THORWOLF.

The State demands his name.

DRUIDESS.

Thus did the king command. Come forward, Varth !

[He advances.]

[Enter Mavian, Ravlan's sister.]

RAVLAN.

Oh, Heaven ! my sister, risen from the dead !

[They embrace.]

VARTH.

What means this vision ? Can the arch fiend take
The form of woman, and come here to mock us ?

MAVIAN.

Dost thou not know me, husband ? Here I am,
Rescued by Providence from cruel death.

VARTH.

Satan hath found me out. Avaunt ! avaunt !
But I'll baulk him and thee.

[He runs away.]

RAVLAN.

This shall be seen to ere I sleep this night.
Come, sister, let us hence.

[*Exit Ravlan and Marian.*]

DRUIDESS.

Heed not my son ; he hath such fits at times,
When great grief takes him, as now, for the king,
And when, upon such grief, treads sudden joy,
As for his wife's return.

THORWOLF.

The State demands the new king's name from thee.

DRUIDESS.

Here is the ring—thou art the chosen man.

[*Gives the ring to Thorwolf.*]

I might have named my son—none would have
known

But that the king had chosen him his heir ;
So now I call you all to bear me witness,
My duty to the State outweighed affection.
Now, therefore, I salute thee, King of Britain,
Setting first pattern of due loyalty.

[*Kneels and kisses his hand.*]

ALL.

Long live King Thorwolf !

[*Exeunt.*]

SCENE V.—*A prison ; Varth in chains.*

VARTH.

Alas ! alas ! now is my whole life wasted,
All by that woman coming on the scene
Just as I felt the crown upon my brows,
And was three-quarters king. It was my fate.
Now, naught is left, where once were heart and hope,
But heaps of ashes, which conceal and guard
Full many a smouldering spark of red remorse,
That all the tears of all the saints in heaven
Could scarcely drown, e'en in a yew tree's lifetime.
It was a woman's plots that did all this,
And each plot, now uncoiled, a serpent is,
That hisses in my face ere stinging me.
Now am I sure as that I wear those chains,
That woman, joined in heart and hand with self,
Is the undoubted origin of evil.

[*Enter King Thorwolf, Ravlan, Mavian, the Judges, etc.*]

FIRST JUDGE.

Prince Varth, the King and Judges of the realm
Have here assembled, that they may decide
Whether thou guilty be, or innocent,
Of the great crime of which thou art accused —
Attempting to destroy thy wife, the princess.

VARTH.

I know the charge, and it is waste of time
To tire me with your legal mummery.
Bring forth your proof, and then enact your worst ;
Your jargon is more painful than your sentence.

SECOND JUDGE.

'Tis form of law, and forms are consecrate
By length of time and ancient precedent ;
Our liberties are founded upon forms,
Some of which, seeming childish as they be,
Were sanctioned by wise men in former times,
And are the outworks of the citadel,
Where cautious Freedom sits, with eyes observant
Of the least shadow of an innovation.

FIRST JUDGE.

Now, Princess, speak thy charge against thy husband.

MAVIAN.

If his offence hath been unnatural,
It is no reason I should follow him,
And seek to cause his death.

SECOND JUDGE.

Hath he not done thee wrong ? not sought thy life ?

MAVIAN.

I care not.

FIRST JUDGE.

Pray let us hear thy sad experience.

MAVIAN.

My lords, my mind is too much steeped in grief
E'en to remember half of what I suffered ;
And Memory in mercy shuts her gates,
So that I cannot enter and see all ;
For if I did, I would be prey to madness,

The sharp remembrance of a hideous evil
Being as poignant as the evil's self,
And, lasting longer, often worse to bear.

SECOND JUDGE.

Has everything that happened been forgotten ?

MAVIAN.

This I remember—that I felt a blow,
And next came darkness. When I oped mine eyes,
I found myself upon the desolate sea,
In a thin skiff, through whose clear, yawning seams,
At every heave she gave, the green wave bubbled.
And thus I drifted all the doleful day ;
At night some kindly fishermen approached,
Discovered me, and brought me home with them.
Their mothers, wives and sisters tended me ;
They healed my wounds, sought to assuage my grief,
And lavished on me all that wealth of kindness
Which never lies concealed in humble hearts
When pain knocks at their doors.

KING

Thy tale is sad ; but, Varth, what answerest thou ?
Knowest thou aught of this foul circumstance ?

VARTH.

I know it all—but then my lips are sealed.
But this much may I tell—'twas not my wish,
But, as the gods know, sore against my will,
That Mavian should be hurt. I'll say no more.
Now, tell me, Mavian, was there not a time
When thou didst think I loved thee ?

MAVIAN.

There was a time thou couldst have died for me,
I know it well. And, while this life remain,
I must remember the deep vows I heard
When first I listened to thy tale of love,
One morn in sunny May time.

VARTH.

Well I remember that sweet morn in May,
You standing in the orchard by my side.
The apple blossoms fluttering o'er your head,
Woody by the purer whiteness of your neck,
Flew from the parent stems that gave them birth,
To nestle in your bosom ; while the breeze,
Borne on melodious and amorous wings,
Toyed with your raven tresses lovingly ;
And, like the strings of an Æolian harp,

Those tresses lent the soft winds as they passed
A sweeter music. Would I were again
The man I was on that one rapturous morn ;
If so, I'd not exchange my privilege
For fifty glittering diadems.

MAVIAN.

Alas ! alas ! that ever I was born.

KING.

Prince Varth, we have not heard thee yet deny
Participation in this fearful business.

VARTH.

I've said enough already.

FIRST JUDGE.

That answer is confession of thy guilt,
And we decide thou shalt be exiled.
Unless the Princess, Mavian, by the right
Which she inherits, both by blood and rank,
Shall choose to interpose.

MAVIAN.

Oh Varth, I know too well your heart will prove
A stern avenger ; but your wife will never

Add even but a breath unto the load
That must already press upon pour conscience.
Remorse is sore enough without reproach,
So, hapless husband, I shall not reproach you,
But make you free, save that in time to come
We must be twain, and ever separate.

[*Exit with Ravlan.*]

KING.

Varth, thou art free, and owe it to a wife
Whose like thou never more wilt see again.

VARTH.

'Tis too late, when my guardian angel's fled,
Chased by my obstinate ingratitude,
Ever to hope to see her, till she come
As my accuser at the Judgment Seat.

FIRST JUDGE.

'Tis true the Prince hath now escaped his meeds,
'Tis also true 'tis a bad precedent ;
But then there is one comfort, which is this,
That, in such cases, in the time to come,
Not every wife will prove a Mavian.

[*Exeunt.*]

ACT IV.

SCENE I.—*A grove.*[*Enter Druidess.*]

DRUIDESS.

Now are the schemes of years dissolved in air,
My plans and intrigues, aye, and even crimes,
Have gone for nothing, aod my years of toil,
Instead of being landmarks of success,
On which I might look back with that fierce pride
Strong natures feel in crushed-down obstacles,
Now seem transformed to mountains that block up
The pathway of the future, and look ready
To fall and crush me if I dare to climb them.
Curse on that blockhead son of mine, I say, ;
Why did he not make sure his wife were dead ?
So that, like baulking ghost, she'd not have come
Between him and the purpose of my life,
Just as I was about to speak the words
That would have made him king—me more than
queen.

A tenfold curse be on his cowardice !
Why did he run away like frightened calf,

When his pale wife infixed her eyes on him ?
Had he but kept his ground, said she was mad,
Or sworn great oaths he knew not of the deed,
And, now he knew it, straightway would avenge it,
His word, and mine to back it, would have gained
The credence that attends on rank and office,
And which an angel's pleadings could not weaken.
When the base craven left me, I was seized
Tight in the vice of fate, with no choice left
Except to give the crown to traitor Thorwolf,
Or to his rival, Ravlan—curse them both !
Still, I will not give up, but try again,
For I will yet have Varth made Britain's king.
But whom to strike at first, new King or Prince,
Is now the query. Ha ! here comes the Northman.
I'll sound him to the bottom of his nature,
And, deep or shallow, 'tis all one to me—
I'll use him either way.

[*Enter Saxo.*]

SAXO.

Good morrow, Priestess,—health and joy to thee !

DRUIDESS.

My thanks are due thee for thy wishes, sir,
But one of them cannot be gratified.

SAXO.

Which one, good Priestess ?

DRUIDESS.

Thy wish for joy.

SAXO.

Is not thy son set free ? Is that not joy ?

DRUIDESS.

Mention him not—I curse the day I bore him.

SAXO.

Is he not brave ?

DRUIDESS.

If bravery consists in killing women,
Then may you count him brave.

SAXO.

He was not present when his wife was set on.

DRUIDESS.

Ah ! was he not ? I was not at his trial,

And have commanded, sir, that none who were,
Should speak of it to me at any time :
However, in thy case I make exception.

SAXO.

I thank thee for this token of regard,
And so may tell thee it was ascertained
Thy son, Varth, was not present when his wife
Was made a prey to violence ; had he been,
He would have used his sword to some account.

DRUIDESS.

Then have I hopes there may be good in him,
In spite of what has passed.

SAXO.

How fares thy daughter, Aidnai ?

DRUIDESS.

She is not married, therefore she doth well.

SAXO.

He whom she marries may most safely swear

That he was born beneath the happiest star
That gladdens all the shining host of heaven.

DRUIDESS.

Why dost thou praise her so ?

SAXO.

I have a poet's eye for comeliness ;
A sculptor's eye for form ; a priest's deep reverence
For absolute perfection ; a soldier's praise
For one who hath for dowry the twin pearls
Of purity and loveliness.

DRUIDESS.

Thou lovest her—I see it in thine eyes.

SAXO.

'Tis true ; but then I never told her so.

DRUIDESS.

What wouldst thou do to gain her ?

SAXO.

All that the hope of mortal ever dared,
Or that the arm of flesh hath ever done.

DRUIDESS.

Well, then, I have in view an enterprise,
In which I earnestly desire success ;
If thou enlist in it thou'lt have my son
Both as a guide and trusty fellow-soldier.
I promise thee this shining recompense—
I'll mould my daughter's mind into a shrine
In which thou easily may'st set thine image,
And keep it there for ever without rival.
What dost thou say to this ?

SAXO.

I close with thy proposal instantly.

DRUIDESS.

Now we may part, but be in readiness
For the instructions I will send to thee.
As soon as my brief plan is perfected,
I'll send my message by a man I trust ;
Obey it thoroughly and speedily,
And see me not until thou hast succeeded,
And then come back and claim thy prize—my daughter.

[*Exeunt.*]

SCENE II.—*The Court.*

King Thorwolf, Ravlan, Saxo, Nobles, etc.

[*Enter Kloof.*]

KLOOF.

My lords, I've turned a jester once again,
And don my royal gear of cap and bells
To shine in trumpery like other monarchs.

KING.

Thou speakest stiffly, Kloof; but say thine errand,
If any brought thee hither.

KLOOF.

Perhaps I lack in reverence, my lord,
But as you have already hosts of fools,
Eager to bend their knees, and pay to you
The worship that they grudge unto their Maker—
I, who am but one man that will not bow,
Nor fawn, like human hound, to King or Prince,
Nor with a blasphemous and slavish tongue
Rob Heaven of titles to bestow on them,—
I, 'mongst the millions that do all these things,
May easily be overlooked or pardoned.

KING.

When did this man first show himself at Court ?

RAVLAN.

Two years have scarcely passed since he came here ;
His manner won at once upon my uncle,
Who made him jester, kindly bore with him,
And made him pet of the prerogative.
He still would refuge take behind a joke,
And leave us all to gather what he meant
From wink, grimace, and solemn shake of head,
Quaint phrase equivocal, and dubious laughter.
Sometimes his manners seemed to speak of Courts,
For he could tell of State-craft, double-dealing,
And shameful plots that politicians lay
To trap each other. In odd, lucid hours,
When memory, like a half-extinguished torch,
Flickered against the back-ground of his life,
He talked right clearly, but to me alone,
Of Kings and Peoples, and their common duties :
How Power and Dependence, everywhere,
Should, hand-in-hand, march on in brotherhood ;
Of courtiers fighting who should fawn the first ;
Of other things, concerning government,
True, every one, and worthy of adoption,
But now they have escaped my memory.

KING.

Would that his mind were sound in every part,
I'd make him councillor of mine for life,
And lodge him royally within my palace.
Wouldst thou not like that, Kloof ?

KLOOF.

My lord, I love not courts nor palaces,
Within whose dusky, sunlight-loathing walls,
Crowned spiders lurk and work the live-long day,
Spinning their treacherous webs of diplomacy
To enmesh unwary Freedom.

SAXO.

His wit is double-edged, like Roman sword.

RAVLAN.

There is no malice in his heart or speech.
His words may startle, but they never wound,
Tickle, but never terrify.

KING.

Thou hast not told us, Kloof, thine errand here ?

KLOOF.

Murder hath brought me here.

KING.

Seize him—he's mad—he's come to murder me.

RAVLAN.

Mad he is not, and he shall have his say,
While I wear sword, wert thou as great a king
As ever cursed the world or butchered it.
Out with it, Kloof, and show thou art not mad.

KLOOF—(*exhibiting a red arrow.*)

My lord, this arrow slew King Athelstane,
And he who shot it is well known to thee.

(*The King falls back in his seat.*)

KING.

Reach me a cup of wine. My lords, I pray you,
Excuse this sudden weakness that o'ercame me ;
It was but natural, for I loved the king,
And the red weapon that drank up his blood,
Thrust up so suddenly before my eyes,
Did pierce me to the heart as it pierced him—
There's something of the woman in us all,
When sorrow strikes us without previous warning.

RAVLAN.

Emotions such as these, my lord, are noble.

KING.

Thanks, gentle Ravlan. Now I charge you all,
On your allegiance, not to mention this,
For murderers have more than human hearing,
And so the ruffians might perchance escape.
It is my right alone to wreak revenge,
And none shall baulk me of the privilege.
My lords, I now dispense with your attendance ;
This jester only shall remain, while I
Sound to its darkest depths this mystery.

[*Exeunt.*]

SCENE III.—*A grove.*

[*Enter Saxo.*]

SAXO.

I wonder what keeps back the messenger
The Druidess was to have sent ere this ;
Surely the business that she has in hand
Is slight, indeed, when two days interpose

M

Between its mention and accomplishment.
'Tis evening now, and I'll not wait much longer ;—
But hold ! here comes some visitor.

[*Enter Messenger.*]

MESSENGER.

My lord, the Priestess sent me with this packet,
And bade me tell you, when you have perused it,
To give it to the flames.

[*Exit Messenger.*]

SAXO.

Now shall I learn what service I must give
As price of Aidnai's love.

[*Reads the missive.*]

“MOST VALIANT SIR,—The King and I desire the death of Ravlan, and honour thee by choosing thee as our instrument. There be State reasons for the act, and thou mayest learn them another time. There are also reasons which should be personal to thyself ; for Ravlan having heard that thou lovest my daughter, and that I favour thy suit, hath determined to attempt thy life.

“ P. S.—When thou hast slain Ravlan, proceed at once to Denmark, and tender the sovereignty of this island to

him who is chief amongst thy countrymen. Make the proposal in my name, on condition that I shall be joint ruler with King Thorwolf, and sole ruler after his death. Keep this latter part of thy commission secret, even to death ; and the reward of thy silence shall be my daughter."

Perdition seize thee for a cunning temptress ;
For thou hast woven net to mesh me with,
That murder, and it only, can unravel.
If I refuse to slay my best of friends,
Then I shall lose for life one I love more
Than father, mother, friend or life itself.
Satan's still ready with alternatives,
When doubt and conscience stand upon their guard,
And hold up Honour's shining shield before them ;
So now he comes, and whispers in mine ear,
" If there's no murder, then there is no love."

[*Enter Ravlan.*]

RAVLAN.

Hast turned astrologist, that thou art here
Gazing upon the stars, as if to spell
Out of their many glorious alphabets,
The name of her thou lovest first and best ?

SAXO.

No, no ; you see me here for no such purpose.
She whom I love best never may love me,—
She loves another far too dear for that.

RAVLAN.

'Tis very hard to know a woman's heart,
For when they love thee best they seem the coldest.

SAXO—(*advancing to shake hands.*)

My lord, shake hands with me—we meet no more.

RAVLAN.

What means this act ? Surely, the shaft of Love
Hath not transfixed thy brain as well as heart ?

SAXO.

I am not mad, but very soon might be
If I remained much longer in your island.

RAVLAN.

Surely, I cannot have offended thee ?
If others have done so, thou hast a friend
Whom nothing can estrange, and who will soon
Make those who have insulted thee crave pardon.

SAXO.

Thank thee, my lord—thou still hast been my friend,
Even from the hour thou dragged me from the furnace ;

And I may best display my gratitude
By leaving thee for ever. Press me not,
I cannot stay ; my fate—your fate—forbid it.

RAVLAN.

A man is what he makes himself, good Saxo.
His passions are the moulds wherein the Fates
Shape all his fortunes.

SAXO.

Enough, my lord—I must not tarry longer ;
It is not safe for me to make delay,
And fiends find opening when we hesitate,
And carry, as by storm, the citadel
Wherein the strongest soul keeps garrison.

RAVLAN.

Thy speech, which, time gone by, was plain as day,
Is now as dark to me as if 'twere read
From Sybelline leaves at midnight.
Prithee, explain ; there must be cause for this ;

For thou art not mercurial, nor a man
Whose acts jump first, and leave his thoughts to
follow.

SAXO.

Silence and I are brethren to-night ;
But this I'll tell thee, look unto thy life,
For it is threatened, and, to-morrow morn,
Unless thou take the warning that I give,
Thou may'st be with thy fathers.

RAVLAN.

Now, as I live, I have forgot my sword.

SAXO.

Then here is mine—it will prove true to thee.

[Unbuckles his weapon and gives it to Ravlan.]

RAVLAN.

Now hast thou made me debtor for my life.

SAXO.

Think not of it, my lord, nor think of me
One short hour hence, or ever in the future.
But I have one request before we part :

Say to the beauteous Aidnai, when ye meet,
That I—no matter now—'tis all in vain :
She might not like it, so, I'll say farewell :
Could she but know I was thy friend to-night,—
But then, 'twould do no good. Again, farewell,
And Heaven bless thee and Aidnai.

[*Exit Saxo, who drops a paper.*]

RAVLAN.

So he is gone, and better, nobler spirit,
Or kinder friend, I never yet have found.
But this may be a sudden spasm of madness,
That always hath concealed itself till now ;
And something tells me he'll be back again.
But what is this ? Ha ! 'tis a document,
And may explain the cause of Saxo's action.

[*Picks up the paper Saxo let fall and reads.*]

Murder and treason, both ! oh, heaven and earth,
But this is villanous as unexpected.
Here is the writing of the Druidess ;
And now I see the whole foul plot untwined,
In which my uncle's life was sacrificed.
She wishes to be Queen, and so employed
Him, who is now the King, to carry out

Her plan of murder, but, by some mischance,
Her scheme miscarried, so she now intends
To strike at me who should possess the throne,
And then to make away with Thorwolf's self,
And seize upon the kingdom, holding it,
Under the base protectorate of strangers.
This latter project I must thwart the first,
And next find means to fasten on the King
The guilt of murder—for, if not his hand,
At least his promptings, knowledge and desire,
Kept pace with the foul deed till all was over.
Did I not see him faint at Kloof's red arrow?
And, the poor jester, from that day till this,
Hath disappeared from sight and cognizance.
Oh, how the Druidess hath tempted Saxo!
Oh, noble soul! She held out such enticement,
That thou wert more than man to conquer it.

[*Enter Varth with drawn sword.*]

RAVLAN.

Whom seek you in this threatening attitude?

VARTH.

'Tis thee I seek. Ho! my companion, there!
Come Saxo, let's fall on!

RAVLAN.

He is not here to aid thy bloody purpose,
So thou must do thy butcher's work alone.

[*Draws.*]

VARTH.

Curse him, he hath deceived me, but, on thee
I will revenge his perfidy, besides
My mother's wrongs and mine.

RAVLAN.

My sister's wrongs give me a giant's strength,
And every wound she bore cries out "Revenge!"

[*They fight, and Varth falls dead.*]

[*Exit Ravlan.*]

SCENE IV.—*A chamber in the palace.*

[*Enter Druidess.*]

DRUIDESS.

Tis now past midnight—surely by this time
The work is done, and Ravlan is no more.
Yet I grow anxious for some speedy news;

'Tis full two hours since I've been waiting here,
And tidings none as yet. Can all be well ?
There is a weight that lies upon my heart,
As if a heavy tomb-stone pressed on it ;
And I have never felt so lone before,
Though I kept vigil in the room with death ;
But then my thoughts were good and fit companions,
While now they come like wolfish visitors,
Look at me through green eyes, and grin at me,
And mutter to my soul dark threatenings.
I wonder what detains my son so long ?
Would that he knew I am so anxious here,
And would prefer his presence at this moment
Even to the glorious tidings that I hope for.

[*Enter Aidnai.*]

AIDNAI.

Good-night, dear mother ; it is growing late,—
But why so pale to-night ? Art thou unwell ?

DRUIDESS.

Thou shouldst be in thy chamber at this hour ;
Why hast thou not retired ?

AIDNAI.

I've been in bed, dear mother, but my sleep
Was haunted and abused by frightsome dreams ;
So I arose and came to seek thee out,
For, though awake, my flesh still creeps with horror.

DRUIDESS.

Dreams such as thine are but the righteous tools
Which an o'erladen and an o'erworked stomach
Uses to plague the fools whose appetites
Still keep the angry little body-builder
Unceasingly at work within his cell.

AIDNAI.

But, my dear mother, I did dream a dream
That makes me shudder—for methought I saw
A tiger's claws fixed in my brother's bosom.

DRUIDESS.

And dost thou think my son will suffer harm
Because that thou hast dreamt it ?

AIDNAI.

If I once thought my dreams would harm my brother,
Then I would pray never to dream again.

DRUIDESS.

Then dream no more, or let thy next dream be
About the husband I have picked for thee.

AIDNAI.

Whom hast thou chosen, mother ?

DRUIDESS.

Saxo, the Dane.

AIDNAI.

I do not love the Northman well enough
Ever to choose him as my lord and master.

DRUIDESS.

Talk to me not of such vile trash as love ;
Soft girls may dream there's such a thing on earth,
But marriage undeceives them. 'Tis for thee
To do my bidding without further question.

AIDNAI.

Do you not call to mind ere that bad night
I was to question Ravlan in his sleep,
You promised me, if he confessed his love,
And that you heard him do so, then at once

You would consent that he should be my husband ?
Now, would it be performance of that promise
To force me into marriage with the Dane ?

DRUIDESS.

Perversity hath changed thee to a lawyer,
Who doth demand of me, for what I do,
Reasons as many as the stars in heaven.

AIDNAI.

I sinned in doing what I did that night ;
You made me sin, and now you punish me.
I'll never wed with Saxo—urge me not—
For there are counter-currents in us all
It is not safe to swim against.

DRUIDESS.

Rebellious suckling ! then I bind thee here,
And here thou shalt remain and starve to death,
Unless thou now conform to what I wish,
And swear upon this spot to wed with Saxo.

AIDNAI.

Better to die than sin for thee again,
For, come what will, I'll keep my vow to Ravlan.

[*The Druidess advances to bind Aidnai with a girdle ; at the same time Kloof rushes in, sword in hand, and carries off the latter.*]

DRUIDESS.

Perdition take that ruffian, or take me !
I'll raise the guard—I'll have him chopped in two ;
I'll mince him inch by inch—I'll torture him—

[*She rushes to the door ; it is closed. Enter a guard from the other side.*]

DRUIDESS.

What means this rudeness, fellows ? Know ye not
This is my private chamber ?

CAPTAIN.

Our duty must excuse our lack of courtesy.

DRUIDESS.

Then out with it at once, uncultured boor.

CAPTAIN.

In the King's name I now arrest thee, Priestess,
For treason 'gainst the Crown and realm of Britain,
In that thou didst complot to yield the Island
Unto the Danish monarch,

DRUIDESS.

Fools! do they think to frighten me with shadows?
I'll go with thee; but ere to-morrow night,
Thou'lt see the authors of this calumny
Flayed, living, as a warning to the world.
But hold, I'm waiting here to see my son,
And after we have speech I'll go with thee.

CAPTAIN.

Thy son and thou will never speak again.
He lay in wait to kill Prince Ravlan,
But was by Ravlan slain—thrust through the heart;
I saw his body not an hour ago.

DRUIDESS.

Oh, Heaven! but now I dare not pray to Heaven,
And 'twere too late to pray, for he is dead.
My son! my son! Have mercy, gentlemen,
And sheath your daggers in this bursting bosom,
To ease me of the burden of this life.
He can't be dead, the son I loved so well,
Loved above all on earth—aye, mine own soul;
He's dead—all's lost—oh, Varth! my son! my son!

[*She faints—Exeunt.*]

SCENE V.—*Cottage by the sea shore.*

[*Enter Bard and Aidnai.*]

BARD.

The spring hath gently covered sleeping winter
With a green mantle, jewelled o'er with flowers,
And the dark prison that was made of earth
Is now the lighted festal home of May,
Where she can nurse her offspring and the sun's
In forest cradles or sweet-bosomed meadows ;
And so, dear Aidnai, in this joyous season,
We welcome thee to this abode of ours,
Where, in the days gone by, thou mad'st the time
Dance past as pleasantly as wedding music,
And all our tongues almost forget their prayers,
In praising all the good they found in thee.

AIDNAI.

Gentle old man, I mind the time full well ;
It is a silver thread that love hath wove
Through all the chequered web of memory,
There to remain for ever.

BARD.

Thou art the same dear soul thou wert of old,—
So tell me, for I'd test thy memory,

What were the things that gave thee most delight
Here in thy days of childhood ?

AIDNAI.

It was, sweet singer, that white rock which stands
Close by the sea ; a mountain ash it bore,
'Neath which, in summer, through the sun-lit day,
I've sat, and watched the grey sea, and the ships
Winging across it, like to butterflies,
And, like them, fading in the far-off blue.
And many a hundred times from that same tree
You plucked me berries for a gaudy necklace,
And made me prize them more by telling me
'Twas they that made the robin's bosom scarlet ;
And so, my necklace on, I used to hope
The robins would come round and play with me ;
And wished I had been born with wings like theirs,
That I might fly and live with them for ever.

[*Enter Kloof and Etha.*]

BARD.

Welcome, my noble lord, and thou, dear sister.

AIDNAI.

I'm happy thou hast come again, kind Kloof.

N

ETHA.

Dear Aidnai, in the future careful be
Not to say "Kloof," or use the title "jester ;"
Henceforward he must have his ancient title,
And must be styled "My Lord."

AIDNAI.

Since when, good nurse, hath this strange fancy
seized thee ?
But surely thou art jesting—Kloof a lord ?

ETHA.

Aye, that he is, and he must have his title ;
I'll tell thee wherefore, at some other time.

AIDNAI.

Hast thou heard news of late how fares my mother ?

KLOOF.

Thy mother is all safe, and Ravlan also.
King Thorwolf now is much enraged at me,
Because I managed to escape from prison,
Wherein he thrust me treacherously, because
I told before his teeth and all the Court,
He knew the arrow that killed Ravlan's uncle.

And he is doubly savage that, the night
I scaled the prison walls, I bore thee off,
Dear Aidnai, from thy mother ; for I hear
He set his soul on making thee his wife.

AIDNAI.

Not while my life and hands remain mine own.

BARD.

Thy heroism mates well with thy beauty ;
And both will be a priceless dower for Ravlan.

KLOOF.

Alas ! I lost a trusty friend in prison.

ETHA.

Who might it be, my lord ?

KLOOF.

He was a hedge-hog, but, inside his coat,
Bristled and barbed, and homely as it was,
There dwelt a heart as tender as a robin's.
He used to waddle daily to my prison,
To lick the chilly hands that patted him.
There was an orchard half a mile away,

And thither, when the twilight-time came on,
My trusty little friend would often toil,
And, early in the dawn, come back again,
His coat stuck o'er with apples which the wind
Had shaken down to serve my tiny gleaner ;
And, having found his way beneath the walls,
Would toddle, loaded, to my lonely cell,
And there unroll the burden from his back,
And tumble o'er with glee, and then look up
Into my face, to claim, as his reward,
That I should pat his head and play with him.
One apple for his share was all he'd take ;
I, with the others, quenched my burning thirst,
And tried to soothe the gnawing hunger-pains,
That on my vitals preyed like starving serpents.
One morn I missed him at his usual hour,
And, looking out, I saw him coming on,
A crowd behind him, pounding him with stones.
I called aloud—he heard my voice, made haste,
But when he neared the hole beneath the walls,
An apple suddenly did roll away ;
He turned to take it up, his little store
Being dearer to him than his life itself.
They killed him ; as he felt the last dull blow
That laid him lifeless, then my poor dumb thing
Turned two wet, pleading eyes toward my cell,

As if to look for answering tears in mine.
I think I see my little servant still,
Now toying with his apple 'fraid to eat it,
Now munching, ere he ventured forth at eve,
The withered bits he saved from morning-tide.

BARD.

It is most sad, my lord ; but pray you, mark,
Aidnai is now in tears.

ETHA.

Brother, remove her home and speak with her.

[*Exit Bard and Aidnai.*]

My lord, it is some long, sad years ago,
Since first you lost your powers of memory.

KLOOF.

Good foster-mother, that is tale too true ;
But, for my part, I cannot even guess
How many years there be since the cloud fell
'Twixt mind and recollection.—This I know,
I cannot tell the things that happened me
But six short days ago ; and my escape,
Though not a half week old,—the moon's my book—
Is even now merged into mistiness.

ETHA.

Three days ago, an ancient crone lay dying ;
She called me to her bed, and told me this—
That, many years ago when Ravlan reigned,
The Druidess took spite against the king,
And wished to have his days cut short by poison.
She hired the crone to do the evil deed,
But the scared woman shrank from crime so vast,
And merely gave the monarch such a draught
As overthrew his reason for a time ;
And when his reason slowly came again,
Remembrance of all his former life,
What he had been, whatever he had done,
Were swallowed in oblivion.

KLOOF.

That woman was a fiend.

ETHA.

She was, my lord, but, on her dying bed,
She made repentance, gave to me this phial,

[*Shows the phial.*]

And told me, if I ever met with one
Whose recollection of the past was blank,

To give it him—that it would make him sleep
Full eight-and-forty hours by the dial,
And, on his waking up, he'd find himself
Restored in memory, and his vanished life
Come up again before him, full as clear
As were the hour and day he first vowed love
To her he made his wife.

KLOOF.

'Tis a strange cure for a most strange disease ;
But, could it make me sleep I'd freely try it,
For I sleep not four hours in twenty-four.

ETHA.

My lord, be not offended if I now
Ask you to test the virtues of this phial ;
The crone who gave it me disclosed me all
The slumber-wooing cordials that compose it.

KLOOF.

I'll trust thee, as thou art my foster-mother.

ETHA—(*Giving him the phial.*)

Swallow this all ; my brother and myself
Will watch by you until you wake, to see
That not the slightest noise shall break upon
The long, deep slumber that will fall on you.

KLOOF.

Give me the phial—I will use it now,
And say good-bye: if memory return,
Thou’rt sure to be remembered.

[*Drinks, and sinks down on a couch.*]

ACT V.

SCENE I.—*A chamber in the palace.*

[*Enter King Thorwolf.*]

KING.

I’m tired of all this pomp and privilege,
And would change places with a beggarman ;
Still, ’tis a question if I would be happy,
Supposing I were poor ; for well I know
The daily martyrdom that poor men suffer.
Bah ! they are nothing more than two-legged worms,
Only allowed to crawl about the world
Because ’twere too much labour to destroy them.

[*Enter Messenger.*]

MESSENGER.

My lord, here is a packet from my mistress.

KING.

'Tis from the Druidess. Then, tell thy mistress,
She shall remain in prison all her life,
Unless, without delay, she tell me where
She hath concealed her daughter.

MESSENGER.

She knoweth not, my lord, and bade me tell
Her daughter was borne off before her eyes
By Kloof, the jester.

KING.

Liar, she also hath corrupted thee :
Out of my sight at once, lest, in an hour,
Thou go and keep thy mistress company.

[*Exit Messenger.*]

Destruction take her, for it was through her
I first resolved on murder ; and, that done,
She tries to filch my blood-bought crown from me,
By plotting treason with a foreign foe.

[*Enter Ravlan and a Courier.*]

RAVLAN.

My lord, excuse my coming at this hour,
But this man only now hath called on me ;
He brings great news—says that the Danish ships
Do wait, like blood-hounds panting on the leash,
To seize the first wind that may sweep them hither.

COURIER.

Prince Ravlan, in brief, hath told my story.

KING.

Disasters seem to follow on each other,
Like jackals trooping to a feast of corpses.
What shall we do, Prince Ravlan ?

RAVLAN.

Impress the swiftest horses—speed the news
Throughout the land as quick as flesh and blood,
Hurried by desperate danger, can convey it.
Send out the forces to protect the ways
That, from the coast, lead to the capital.
For, if we lose the coast, 'tis but an arm
Compared to the whole body ; but, indeed,
The capital once seized, it will become
An eating ulcer in the nation's breast,
And the whole frame will rot and drop in pieces.

KING.

Stand back! What's that? Dost thou not see it,
Prince?

It is thine uncle, Ravlan—see, he comes!
And, look, he frowns on me.

[The ghost of Ravlan's uncle appears, and holds a red arrow pointed to its breast.]

RAVLAN.

See what? There are none here but three of us;
Beyond, around, there's naught but empty space.

KING.

Look, there it is! now it doth raise its hand,
And beckons thee to come away from me.
Leave me not, Ravlan—it may be a devil
Has come to tear me, thinking me alone.
There's malice in its eyes—it grins at me;
Canst thou not say a prayer to chase it back?
I have forgotten mine.

RAVLAN.

Thy fancy hath the upper hand of reason,
For I see nothing here but us three.

KING.

Again it warns thee off—good goblin, see !
I cannot harm thy nephew—I'm unarmed.

[*The ghost advances.*]

The thing comes nearer—oh, is there no devil
Stronger than thou to drag thee from my sight ?
Canst thou not go and fright the Druidess ?

RAVLAN.

Thou art unwell, my lord—come hence to bed.

KING.

Oh, Heaven ! 'tis going to speak—stand closer, Rav-
lan—
Its lips begin to move—it lifts its hand,
And shakes a bloody arrow at my head.

RAVLAN.

Ah, is it Kloof's red arrow that it shakes ?

KING.

Now thou hast learnt it all—come, slay me, man,
And then I shall escape that red accuser.

GHOST.

Better than mine thy fate shall be ;
'Twas hand of friend that slaughtered me ;
But hand of foe shall lay thee low,
And friend of mine will strike the blow.

[*The King swoons, and is borne off by Ravlan and the Courier.*]

SCENE II.—*The Bard's Cottage.*

[*Enter Aidnai and Etha.*]

AIDNAI.

I'm growing anxious for my mother, Etha ;
'Tis a long time since news has come from Court.
It looks suspicious, and I have a dread
That something evil lurks behind this silence.

ETHA.

Aidnai, compose thy mind, for she is well
Whom thou hast always looked upon as mother.

AIDNAI.

I understand thee not—dost mean to say
The Druidess is not my mother ?

ETHA.

The time has come, and thou wilt hear it all.
One night upon our isle a tempest swooped,
The sea uprose, and, with green jaws agape,
Swallowed the shore, and frighten'd all the land.
Next morn the sun looked out with angry brow,
Frowning at what he saw the storm had done
When he was absent. On that morn I saw
A woman lying dead upon the beach ;
And, in the scanty light, the felon waves,
When looking on her, seeing what they'd done,
Seemed to shrink back, and in the moans they made,
Accused the winds, now whining themselves dead,
Of this most cruel havoc. There she lay,
Se sweetly beautiful, I could not marvel
That Death would never let such prize escape.
Upon her bleeding breast, her white arms clasp'd
A little famishing babe, that vainly sought
With lips all blue, benumbed and helpless hands,
To find the dried up founts of infancy.
Thou wert that child, my Aidnai, and 'twas I
Snatched thee from out the clutches of the Fates,
And was thy second mother.

AIDNAI.

Oh, some exist for love ! thou'rt one of them,

And, in that act of kindness, seem'st to me
To stand far nearer to the gods above
Than any one that breathes the air of Britain.
Oh, more than second mother, could I sit
And tend thee night and day a hundred years,
It would not half repay thee ; sad it is,
That all the love I feel I cannot show,
And that 'tis only worth the empty words
In which I give it utterance.

ETHA.

Thou hast repaid me twenty-fold, my daughter.

AIDNAL.

Sometimes in dreams by night I've seen a face
That must have been my mother's—its soft eyes
Would yearn above me mournfully ; its lips
Would move, as if in uttering blessing
In silent language only known to saints ;
A snow-white hand would beckon me at times
To come away, and, when I tried to follow,
I'd wake, and the ecstatic dream was gone.
Oh, mother ! would the ravening waves had spared
Thy life, and taken mine.

ETHA.

For thy dear sake I've suffered obloquy,
And for thy sake I even welcomed it.
I've now grown old, but, when I was a girl,
I was accounted fairest of the fair ;
And, at that time, the gates of future joy
Stood opened wide to give me entrance ;
They closed upon me soon, and sooth it was
Thy baby hand that closed them ; for, 'twas said,
By some, who envied me my peerless beauty,
That, Aidnai, thou indeed wert mine own infant.
My youth is now gone by, my beauty too,
But I regret them not ; for thy great love,
Has more than twenty-fold surpassed the love
I ever would have had from any husband.

AIDNAI.

Oh, that I e'er was spared to bring down sorrow
On thee who gave me birth a second time !

ETHA.

Mourn not for me, my Aidnai,—all is past
Except the love you bear me.

[*Enter Kloof in a jester's garb.*]

KLOOF.

Dost know me, Aidnai ?

AIDNAI.

Aye, my good Kloof—or, should I say, my lord ?

ETHA.

Yes, Aidnai, that is now the title due ;
For he, in whose great presence we now stand,
Is Britain's long-lost ruler, good King Ravlan,
The father of the Prince you love so well.

[*Kloof throws off his jester's robe, and displays, beneath, the
royal garments. Etha hands him the crown.*]

AIDNAI.

Can this be real, Etha, for it seems
Too pleasant to be true ?

ETHA.

'Tis real, Aidnai, and no phantom joy.

AIDNAI.

How strange it is the whole world thought him dead.

KLOOF.

My memory, Aidnai, hath indeed been dead,
But 'twas my foster-mother, Etha, there,
Who gave it life again ; and now, in truth,

O

My past existence is as plain to me
As is the pleasant smile on thy sweet face.

AIDNAI.

Thou well becomest these thy royal robes.

KLOOF.

Perhaps thou wilt not say so in the future ;
When thou behold'st, on quite another stage,
This tinsel and this frippery of office,
The overbearing look and icy eye,
The cold and unimpassioned countenance,
The shoulder raised, like to a goading bull's,
The pompous strut and freezing courtesy,
Which are a king's by nature, and are mine.

AIDNAI.

Oh, far too well I know thee to believe
Those robes will cloud the sunshine of thy soul.

[*Enter a Servant.*]

SERVANT.

My lord, a messenger hath just arrived
Post haste from Court, and sent by Ravlan.

[*Exeunt Aidnai and Etha.*]

KLOOF.

There's something at the bottom of this haste,
Which I must grapple instantly.

[*Exeunt Kloof and Servant.*]

SCENE III.—*A chamber in the Palace ; Enter King Thorwolf
and Druidess.*)

KING.

And so, my fair petitioner, at last
Thou hast thy liberty—but use it well.

DRUIDESS.

'Tis almost time that I should be released ;
'Twas not thy heart, but dire necessity,
That ever moved that sottish soul of thine
To ope my dungeon doors and set me free.

KING.

I did not order thine arrest for nothing.
Didst thou not try to work such deadly treason
As ne'er was known, since treason first became
A nightmare unto kings ? Nor was this all—
With treachery seldom e'en in woman seen,

Thou hast, in base defiance of thy promise,
Concealed from me thy daughter.

DRUIDESS.

Speak not to me of treason—look within,
And tell me is that soul of thine unspotted ?
If I planned treason 'gainst thy crown and thee,
Didst thou not plot the same against thy king,
And even cap thy treason with his life ?
Thou now art king—the king can do no wrong,—
And, therefore, when I followed thine example,
Thy common sense must hold me to be blameless.
As to my daughter, I will swear to thee
I know not where the jester hath her hidden.

KING.

Thou art an evil spirit, but such may,
For its own ends, give good advice at times ;
Therefore, I ask thee what had best be done
In this emergency of dread invasion ?
Thou knowest I must take the field myself,
And must appoint a regent in my absence ;
Whom, then, should I select—Prince Ravlan ?

DRUIDESS.

Art mad ? Thou knowest he's thine enemy ;

And, in thine absence, would corrupt the people,
Magnify slight reverse to dreadful danger,
Blast thy repute, and that is the main pillar
On which all thrones must rest ; and, wert thou slain,
He'd vault at ease into the glorious seat
It cost thee so much trouble to obtain.
Send him to keep his uncle company,
And make me regent while thou shalt be absent.

KING.

No, come what will, I'll never murder more.

DRUIDESS.

Is that thy firm resolve ?

KING.

If I invoked the gods of Samo-Thrace,
Who punish very thought of perjury,
Even before the thought spread into action,
Resolve could not be firmer or more sacred.

DRUIDESS.

Fool ! then I go and leave thee to thy fate ;
He's not worth saving who can stifle hate.

[*Exit Druidess.*]

KING.

Come back ! I will obey thee once again—

[*Enter Ravlan.*]

RAVLAN.

The Danish barques have spread their wings for
flight,
And with a vulture's speed, sweep hitherward.

KING.

How do we muster ?

RAVLAN.

The warlike Scots have made an armistice,
And all our people rush, hot-haste, to fight.
Soldiers are speeding from beyond the Humber,
And, there come dashing on, in waves of war,
Those huge artificers who rake and vex
The bowels of the much-enduring earth,
In tin-ribbed Cornwall.

[*Enter Courier.*]

COURIER.

I bring good news, my lords, from Ireland.

RAVLAN.

From Ireland ? then 'tis welcome news, we know.
From men of our own breed we may expect
Either the tidings of some glorious fight
Gained 'gainst our common enemy, the Dane,
Or sympathy for kinsmen pressed like us
By all the swarms of Northland.

COURIER.

'Tis glorious news, my lords ; our Irish kin
Have heard their holy Druids prophesy
Some great disaster, coming from the North,
Upon the Isle of Britain.

KING.

Then they have warned both wisely and in time ;
Altars are dear to priests as thrones to kings.
Monarchs and priests are twin-born for all rule,
They are the two main pillars of the world,
And, if they wish to stand, must press together.

RAVLAN.

But what response returned the Irish septs
To this most timely warning ?

COURIER.

All Ireland is aflame—the battle torch,
In one short night, flew from the east to west,
And then from north to south, and did outstrip
The breeze that fed it. 'Twas a glorious sight !
The mountain peaks stood up, with spears of fire,
To sentinel their valleys, and to warn
Their rocky rivals, scores of miles away,
Danger was on the wing. The streams, they say,
O'erflowed their banks that night, for kindred rage,
So many men swam o'er them fully armed,
Hot and intent on battle.

RAVLAN.

If Neptune claim the ocean, then ought Mars
Claim, as his own particular heritage,
That warrior-land, that cradle of renown,
Diana's sanctuary and her home,
Valorous and virtuous Ireland.

KING.

Ravlan, 'tis thine to see our Irish allies
Are warmly welcomed. Now we'll separate,
Each to prepare him for to-morrow's battle.

[*Exeunt.*]

SCENE IV.—*Tent near the field of Battle—Courtiers at the door.*

FIRST COURTIER.

The fight must be most desperate—'tis an hour
Since last we had a message from the front.

[*Alarums, etc.*]

SECOND COURTIER.

If thou art hungry for some further news,
Jump on a horse, and hie thee to the battle.

FIRST COURTIER.

The King hath placed me here—I must not move ;
He knows that in the closet I can serve him
Better than in the field.

SECOND COURTIER.

The King doth risk his life, why not risk thine,
In order to find out how fares the monarch ?

FIRST COURTIER.

The King, of course, doth put his life in peril,
But peril always is the price of greatness.

[*Enter wounded soldier.*]

FIRST COURTIER.

Which way, brave friend, doth victory incline ?

SOLDIER.

Good sir, our forces hold their grip like bull-dogs ;
'Tis a stiff battle ; wounded men are few,
And slain men many.

[*Exit soldier.*]

[*Enter second wounded soldier.*]

SECOND COURTIER.

Hast seen the King ? How does he bear himself ?

SOLDIER.

To which King hath thy question reference ?

SECOND COURTIER.

I mean King Thorwolf, not the Danish King.

SOLDIER.

Two Kings are leading on the British hosts ;
The strange King wears a golden misletoe
Full on his helmet's front—the valiant badge
Was never worn by any but King Ravlan ;
And I would swear, but that I know he's dead,

'Tis Ravlan dropped from heaven, or sprung from
earth,

Whom I saw, 'mid the smoke an hour ago,
Leading the onset of the Irish battle.

SECOND COURTIER.

Take thyself hence—thou'rt mad.

SOLDIER.

Reville me not, thou trembling army midwife,
Following camps to bring forth monster lies,
And pick the dead men's pockets. Now, again,
I'll swear I saw two Kings—wilt thou deny it?

FIRST COURTIER.

Answer him not—perhaps he is not mad,
But he might grow so, of a sudden impulse,
With the design of slaying both of us.

[*Exit soldier.*]

[*Enter a Captain.*]

CAPTAIN.

The day is ours—the foe are all cut down ;
Their helmets strew the strand like shining shells ;
Their bodies hide the field on which they fought ;

Their javelins you might gather up in sheaves,
And you might walk, aye, ankle deep in plumes,
And cover half the cliffs with foreign bucklers.

[*Enter soldiers bearing spoils, etc.*]

FIRST COURTIER.

How fares the King, brave countrymen ?

SOLDIER.

I saw two Kings—I will make oath on't ;
The strange King and the Prince fought side by side,
And none can count the foes they slew to-day,
Except the sooty ferryman.

[*Enter Ravlan, Saxo, officers, etc.*]

SAXO—(*addressing Ravlan.*)

My lord, I tender you a soldier's thanks
For having saved my life, when left alone,
In your last onset.

RAVLAN.

I owe thee life, and more than life, brave Saxo ;
And, since thy fortune threw thee in my hands,
Thou hast thy freedom, and, if thou accept,
Thou hast my olden friendship.

SAXO.

I take it in the spirit it is given ;
I will remain with thee, and, while life last,
Will share thy fortune always.

[*Exit Saxo.*]

FIRST COURTIER.

How did our Irish allies fight, my lord ?

RAVLAN.

With the tempestuous valour of their race.
They claimed, as theirs, the right van of the battle,
And, like a thunderbolt, they tore right through
The compact mounds of spearmen—everywhere
They charged like lions, not like mortal men ;
And, when the struggle hung in even scale,
They turned the tide ; and Denmark's raven fled
Wherever flamed their swords or flashed their flag,
The victory-winning Sun-Burst.

[*Enter Thorwolf, and King Ravlan in pursuit.*]

KING RAVLAN.

Stop, murderer and usurper ! now, at last,
Thy crime-stained life will answer for my brother's.

THORWOLF.

Thou art a phantom, come in Ravlan's shape,
And sword of mine is vain against a spirit.

[*They fight ; Thorwolf falls.*]

KING RAVLAN.

Soldiers ! I am your King, whom you thought dead ;
He whom I've slain conspired against my life,
And, with a woman whom you know too well,
Sought, many years ago, to poison me.
He also killed my brother, the late king,
And, since that time, hath brought the State so low,
That slaves could mock, and strangers spit at it.
But let this pass—a better day will dawn
For you, for Britain, and for all of us ;
And we will celebrate it by forthwith
Dividing, amongst those who fought to-day,
Such a reward that you will pray the gods
To send you once a year such victory.

ALL.

Long live our lost King Ravlan ! Hail ! all hail !

[*Exeunt.*]

SCENE V.—*A banqueting hall—King, Ravlan, Aidnai, Saxo, Nobles, etc.*

KING RAVLAN.

Now doth the olive branch of peace entwine,
Along with laurel leaves, our soldiers' brows ;
The scars of war have almost all been healed,
The widow and the orphan comforted,
The brave rewarded and the timid pardoned,
The nation pleased, the monarch satisfied,
And the propitious Deities been honoured.

PRINCE RAVLAN.

There yet remains the amnesty.

KING.

In truth you do anticipate me, Ravlan.
Now I command that proclamation issue
That, on account of the great victory
Which hath of late been vouchsafed to our arms,
A general amnesty be granted all
Who, for transgressions 'gainst the State and Crown,
May now be held in durance.

PRINCE RAVLAN.

To-morrow's sun brings in the wedding day

Of Aidnai and me, and she requests,
And I will back it, as a suppliant,
That in the amnesty to be proclaimed,
The Druidess be mentioned specially.

KING.

We'll think of the request, and act to-morrow.

[*Enter Druidess.*]

DRUIDESS—(*kneeling.*)

My lord, I take advantage of this banquet,
And of your clemency, well known of old,
To venture to your footstool, unannounced,
Accompanied by none, and unbefriended,
To ask you to forgive one who hath sinned
Far more through ignorance of your many merits,
And evil council given her by others,
Than through the natural badness of her heart.

AIDNAI.

I pray thee to forgive her for my sake ;
For when a woman doth confess her fault,
Her penitence is real : do not spurn it.
She hath been kind to me beyond desert ;
And, if you love me, prove it to me now,
By showing her the mercy that she pleads for.

RAVLAN.

I add my earnest prayer to that of Aidnai.
'Twould be a cloud cast o'er the general joy
If this misguided woman were picked out
For special obloquy.

KING.

'Tis hard, indeed, to overlook the past,
For none except my Maker and myself
Know what I have endured, and all through her.
Still, at my time of life, it were not wise
To dig up, jackal-like, the noxious corpse
Of that resentment that had best be buried,
And on whose grave I should plant Mercy's flowers;
Therefore I grant forgiveness to this woman,
And she is pardoned, to the full extent
That man may use that great prerogative,
Whose use at all times raises him to Heaven,
As high as if his feet were on the steps
Of the twin ladders, Hope and Holiness.

DRUIDESS—(*rising.*)

My lord, my future life will prove to you
That, 'mongst the many failures I possess,
Ingratitude is absent.

KING RAVLAN.

Then foster that one virtue ; it may prove,
In course of time, the parent of a hundred.

[*She retires behind the King.*]

KING RAVLAN—(*placing a crown on Aidnai's head, and his own on Ravlan's.*)

Ravlan, I am too old for things of State,
Therefore I do confer my crown on thee,
And on this girl the diadem of Queen.
To-morrow ushers in your wedding day,
And I perform this act that honour may
Herald in future pleasure ; and proclaim
Ravlan, my Son, and Aidnai his betrothed,
The King and Queen of Britain.

[*Flourish of trumpets, amidst which the Druidess, dagger in hand, rushing towards Prince Ravlan, who is looking in another direction, exclaims :*]

Thou never shalt be King, and my Varth dead !
Now I revenge my son.

[*Aidnai flies between Ravlan and the Druidess, and receives the blow.*]

DRUIDESS.

Bloody and barren blow, so like my life—
I'll try another.—

[*She rushes again at Ravlan, but is seized by Saxo.*]

SAXO.

Tigress and harpy, hag and fiend in one,
Off to thy cursed kindred thou shalt go !

[*He gives the Druidess into the custody of the guard, who remove her.*]

AIDNAL.

Farewell, dear Ravlan—oh, remember me :
For I did love thee more than tongue can tell ;
But thou canst never know it on this earth,
And I must pass away before I prove it.
Do not revenge me, Ravlan ; let thy love
Be weighed against thine anger for this blow,
And so thou wilt content me in my death,
And make my spirit happy ; so farewell.
Oh, when the day breaks thou wilt lonely be—
Heaven take my place beside thee in the morn.

[*Dies.*]

RAVLAN.

Sayest thou in the morning, darling ? No !
Morn on this earth will never find me more ;

Thou wert my life's bright morning star, and now
Thou art eclipsed, and 'neath that self same cloud
I'll hide myself for ever.

[*Stabs himself.*]

Thus, Aidnai, fade our dreams of Youth and Hope.
The day that rose in gold dies out in gloom—
So dies my reason on Love's bleeding breast.
Minstrels, take heed ! for, when my Aidnai comes,
All your most rapturous and love-winged notes
Will leave your strings and find their way to her,
And, floating round her, settle on her lips,
Whenever they shall ope to call me husband.
Give me thy hand, my Aidnai ! Here 'tis dark,
But I will lead thee to a light beyond.
Ah ! wherefore turn away and fly from me ?
Now I have lost thee, still I hear thy voice,
And the dear coming morn will show me thee.
So I will grope for thee the whole night through,
And ring the bells for thee when dawn comes on,
And thou wilt fly to me, upon thy brow
Thy crown of bridal roses.

[*Dies.*]

THE END.







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